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STORMLIGHT

OR,

THE NIHILIST'S DOOM

J. E. MUDDOCK

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY GORDON BROWNE



1

STORMLIGHT: OR, THE NIHILIST'S DOOM.

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“ With a quick movement he raised his arm, and fired.”

STORMLIGHT

OR

THE NIHILIST'S DOOM

A STORY OF SWITZERLAND AND RUSSIA

BY

J. E. MUDDOCK, F.R.G.S.,

Late Swiss Correspondent for "The Daily News."

AUTHOR OF "A WINGLESS ANGEL," "AS THE SHADOWS FALL," "FROM THE BOSOM OF THE DEEP," "THE DEAD MAN'S SECRET," "STORIES WEIRD AND WONDERFUL," &C.

NEW EDITION.

WITH TWO ILLUSTRATIONS BY GORDON BROWNE.

WARD, LOCK, BOWDEN AND Co.,

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1892.

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NOTE.

MANY of the incidents of this story, startling and thrilling as they are, are in the main strictly true, the information having been supplied to me from official sources.

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STORMLIGHT.



INTRODUCTION.


GENEVA AND NIHILISM.

FROM time immemorial Geneva has been the home of conspiracy and the refuge of political adventurers from all parts of the world. Nihilism, exterminated from its own soil, found a congenial atmosphere there, and has taken root and flourished. When Prince Krapotkin was being tried at Lyons, the President of the Tribunal described Geneva as the "Cancer of Europe." This was severe, but it was not altogether an undeserved reproach. And if nothing else had justified it, the assassination of the late Emperor of Russia would have done so, for it was in Geneva, beyond all question of doubt, that the plot for that dastardly deed was organized. The assassins are known to have gone from Geneva direct to Russia, and one of them who escaped Russian vengeance—a female—still lives, and finds a refuge and a home under the fostering care of the Swiss Republic.

If one is asked why the city on the shores of Lake Léman should have been chosen as the favourite abiding-place of those who would reform society and reconstitute their country by the aid of dynamite and bombshells, the answer is easily given. It is due to its geographical position. One can step out of Geneva into French territory in a few minutes,

and half-a-dozen hours will place one on Italian or German soil. The advantages of this will at once strike the reader. A man commits an offence in Germany say, and he flies for shelter to Geneva. In time he hears that the German police have a warrant, and are seeking permission from the Swiss Government to take him ; but, before this can be done, he strolls into France, or takes the train, or crosses one of the Passes into Italy. And, before he could be arrested, permission from the respective Governments of those countries would have to be sought. If a man murders another man in a drunken brawl and flies to an alien country, his extradition is simple and easy ; but, if a man slays an Emperor or King, or throws a dynamite bomb into the midst of a crowd of innocent people, so long as he does it in the name of some political agitation, most of the European Governments will afford him protection and shelter, and his extradition is a matter of extreme difficulty. He is looked upon as a political refugee, and political refugees are treated with peculiar leniency and toleration, though heaven knows why. The worst sinners in this respect are Switzerland and England, and in London and Geneva may be found men who might not inaptly be described as "neither ghoul nor human," but a mixture of both, with the very worst attributes of the latter.

Geneva is not an extensive city, but it has a population of 80,000 souls. Within late years it has extended and improved, and the so-called new town has, to a large extent, hidden away the squalor and dingy wretchedness of the old. As one approaches Geneva from the upper part of the lake, and beholds its site, it is impossible to prevent a mental exclamation—"What a wonderful city the French or the Italians would have put there !" A city of marble, surely, for on the Simplon, a few hours away, are exhaustless hoards of marble, and it was from these hoards that wonder of the world, Milan Cathedral, was built. All Europe might be ransacked, and it would scarcely be possible to find a more



beautiful site for a city than that occupied by Geneva at the present day. The delightful country, the superb lake stretching for fifty-six miles, the long line of the blue Juras, the elevated and rugged crags of the great and little Salève that rise to the south, and the densely-wooded range of the Voirons to the east ; while further away, in the dim distance, are the eternal snows of the mighty Alps, and mightiest amongst them all towers the head of hoary Mont Blanc. These physical features, seen under the aspects of clear atmosphere and sunny skies, constitute a panorama that can hardly be outrivalled ; and even when the winter snows have whitened all the landscape it still possesses a beauty that is enchanting. The deeply-blue Rhone, with its clear sparkling water, flows through part of the town, while in the western suburbs the white Arve, having its birth amongst the eternal snows of Mont Blanc, rushes along to wed itself to the Rhone, two miles away. Whether the traveller directs his steps east, west, north, or south of the city, he cannot fail to be struck by the beauty of its surroundings. The richness and variety of the foliage, the vivid greenness of the grass, the profusion of wild flowers, which everywhere grow in rank luxuriance ; the magnificent chestnuts, which, finding something congenial in the soil, the atmosphere, or both, flourish amazingly ; the vine-clad slopes, the rolling country, the splendid mountains, on which the shifting lights ever play, and which are for ever passing through gradations of colour, all tend to make up a picture of chaste and artistic beauty. And yet this site, with all its unique advantages, is occupied by an architectural excrescence, so to speak, and that excrescence has been defined as the "Cancer of Europe."

Fifty years ago or less Geneva was only half its present size, and was then strongly fortified and partly walled round. The fortifications have long since been dismantled, though traces of them still remain. The old town abounds in steep streets, which in many parts are narrow and gloomy. The


houses are tall and ancient, dating back for hundreds of years. Mysterious passages and gloomy alleys everywhere meet the explorer, and dismal openings in the walls are suggestive of entrances to Hades, though they are only the doorways to the ill-smelling, ill-lighted, and insanitary dwellings of the poorer classes of people.

These old places are huddled together on hilly ground, while the newer town has grown up around them, and the streets are for the most part level. The Rhone is spanned by six bridges, one of these, the Pont du Mont Blanc, being a handsome structure not unworthy of the site on which the city is built.

The people of Geneva, the Genevese themselves, are an exclusive and inhospitable people—in hospitable to strangers. Calvin has left his stamp of bigotry upon them, and they are singularly intolerant and narrow-minded. As a people they are very mixed in their origin, Italy, France, and Germany being represented. Their sympathies are French, but they themselves are Genevese. That is, they can hardly be called Swiss except by courtesy, and so high is the opinion they hold of themselves that they look with contempt upon the inhabitants of German Switzerland, frequently speaking of them as "foreigners."

Of the representatives of other nations who have made Geneva their home, the Russians largely outnumber all those of other countries put together. A few years ago the English colony mustered nearly three thousand strong ; but a variety of causes, not the least being the extortion that was practised upon them, served to drive them away ; they shifted farther up the lake, and are to be found now settled in the neighbourhood of Montreux and Lausanne.

The Russian colony is stronger than the English ever was, and amongst them are to be found men and women who have made themselves notorious throughout the world for their bitter and uncompromising hatred of the rulers of their country. It is safe to say that there is hardly a Russian in



Geneva who is not a Nihilist. But, unlike the Socialists from other countries, the Russians are exclusive. They keep to themselves ; they have their own booksellers, their own papers, their own cafés. Their ways are mysterious ; they do not obtrude themselves ; they are a silent, reserved, thoughtful brotherhood, bound together by common sympathies,—by the same hopes, the same aims. Patient they have proved themselves to be, as well as terrible and deadly in the execution of their revengeful purposes. Many of these men and women are members of noble families who have been driven from Russia by a cruel despotism worse than that instituted by the tyrant Nero. In their exile they dream of the day when their country shall be regenerated ; when the intellectual darkness in which Russia is now plunged shall be chased away by the light of knowledge ; and when just laws and a humane government shall take the place of the autocratic despotism which now spreads misery from one end of Russia to the other. But that day is far off yet, and the dreamers sink into the sleep that knows no awakening, and are laid to rest among their kindred who have found refuge in this lake city. The gaps, however, that death makes in the colony, do not remain long unfilled, for new-comers take their place. Who they are, where they come from, and what they come for could not be told by any one not in the secrets of the fraternity, and even if one of the fraternity was to divulge any of these secrets, a vengeance terrible and sharp would overtake him.

Unlike the Fenians, the Socialists, the Dynamitards, and other leagues of desperate men, these Russians get not on to the housetops and proclaim their plans. They are, to all appearances, a quiet, longsuffering, and unobtrusive people ; shrinking from all publicity, keeping strictly to themselves, and carefully avoiding any interference in matters in which they have no direct concern. Russia and things Russian alone occupy their thoughts ; and though they may be mistaken in their views, and take desperate means to give

emphasis to those views, there can be little doubt that many of them are deeply sincere, and sacrifice their lives in endeavouring to bring about the results which they honestly believe must be brought about before their unhappy country can take her place in the van of civilization.

It is an open secret that the Russian Nihilists are bound together by a terrible oath, and that death is the penalty of any betrayal of secrets. In fact, even to be suspected of being traitorously inclined is to run the risk of assassination. Many a mysterious crime that has occurred on the Continent during the last decade or two may be laid to the charge of Nihilism or Socialism.

In Geneva Nihilism has found a resting-place. It has done more than that; it has grown a mighty power; a power silent, mysterious, and deadly as the pent-up forces of the volcano which for a time sinks into apparent quiescence, and then when least suspected suddenly bursts forth with awful and destructive fury. Nihilism has spread through every class of Russian society. Beautiful girls and promising youths have fallen under its influence, and allowing their enthusiasm to run away with their discretion have come within the merciless grip of the law, and gone down into the dust ere yet the spring of their years had passed. The Army, the Navy, the Church, the Aristocracy have all their representatives of Nihilism, and in the formidable brotherhood noble and peasant rub shoulders. Nor can the knout, the gallows, the torture practised in the reeking dungeons of St. Petersburg and Moscow; nor the unutterable horrors of Siberia break or destroy this power. Its tremendous organization; its vast and far-reaching ramifications and the fearlessness and self-sacrificing devotion of those who uphold it were proved in the most startling manner during the lifetime of the late Czar, and by the terrible crime which, in spite of all precautions, sent him to eternity. The schemes of these Nihilists may be visionary, and their political opinions partake of the character of frenzied enthusiasm;

but thousands and tens of thousands of men and women are deeply imbued with the ideas, and to the carrying out of these ideas they devote their lives, they sacrifice their fortunes, they ruin their reputations, they go into exile, and find rest in nameless graves. The organization which binds these thousands of human beings together in one common brotherhood is marvellous in its perfection, terrible in its rigidity, and pitiless in its vengeance for any betrayal of its secrets. The system of espionage which is exercised over the brotherhood is no less wonderful, and it extends to the farthest corners of the earth. The tail of Nihilism may be said to stretch all over the world. Its head is fixed in Geneva.

PROLOGUE.



CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS COUNT.

ON each side of the Lake of Geneva runs an admirably kept road. That on the north side is some little distance from the Lake for a mile or two, but on the south it skirts the Lake for many miles. This road is adorned on the water side by a row of chestnut trees, which afford delightful shade in the burning summer months when the sun pours down its rays with tropical fierceness. Then the lake usually lies in dreamy stillness, its great expanse glittering like a stupendous silver mirror. It is pleasant at such a time to sit under these trees on the seats that are provided, and be fanned by the refreshing currents of air that come off the water.

On the right of the road, embosomed amongst trees, and surrounded by the greenest of verdure and parterres of flowers, are innumerable villas. These are called *Campagnes*, meaning rural residences. Some of them are the summer resorts of the Genevese, and at that season the picturesque effect of these houses dotting the hill-sides and framed in settings of the most exquisite colouring is enchanting, especially when viewed from the lake, for the ground is rolling, swelling up here and there in great green mounds, or depressed into verdant dells and mossy ravines. Farther

inland the land rises into hills, and further away still it crops up into rocky ridges with serrated outlines, while between these ridges one gets glimpses of the glittering snows of the solemn Alps.

The greater part of the campagnes are the residences of foreigners, not a few of them being wealthy Russians. And when, on a dreamy summer day, one drifts idly and listlessly on the bosom of the blue lake, and gazes on these beautifully-situated houses, with their environing trees, and the magnificent expanse of country, with its shady dells, its green uplands, its shattered crags, and the eternal snows of the great mountains, one is led to think that here the weary wanderer on life's road might find rest and sweet peace far from the madding crowd in an earthly paradise. For Nature has made a glorious land, and endowed it with everything that tends to render the earth refreshing and beautiful to the senses. Even in the winter, when the lake is tossed like an angry sea, and the fierce and bitter glacial wind, known as the *Bise*, lashes the earth with fury ; when the colouring of the landscape has faded away, and the leafless trees shiver in the pitiless blasts, there is still beauty, though of another order, for the eternal mountains are clothed from base to summit in white, which throws into strong relief the purple pine forests ; while ever-shifting lights and shades play over the scene. The villas then are deserted, save those that are inhabited by foreigners who reside all the year round ; but the Genevese themselves like to huddle in the town in winter weather, and they give the suburbs and the outskirts a wide berth.

To one of these villas we will introduce the reader in the summer time. The campagne is known as *La Garence*. The house stands on rising ground, and is surrounded with an extensive garden that is filled with pines and cedars that mingle their dark foliage with the brighter colours of chestnuts, oaks, ashes, limes, and beeches. Well-kept parterres of flowers and emerald green strips of lawn are caught sight

of between the trees ; while, before the house, a fountain plashes and gurgles, and its waste water is carried off by a little rocky channel cut through the grounds, and arranged with artificial cascades, the banks of which are lined with soft cool moss and nodding ferns. The house is an old house, rambling as to its architecture and spreading itself out in an indecisive sort of way as though at first it had resolved to go up the hill and then had changed its plan and gone down. Ivy clothed its walls, and a magnificent westeria framed most of the front windows, each of which, in accordance with Swiss fashion, was provided with green shutters, useful for keeping out the glaring sunlight of summer and the icy bise of winter alike. The house was almost entirely screened from the road by trees, but a tower that rose up from the roof at one end commanded a wonderful view. There was the lake, stretching into the blue distance like an inland arm of the sea, and at its head, where the arrowy Rhone enters after its long journey from the glacier of the same name, could be seen in certain states of the atmosphere the scarped and shattered snow-clad aiguilles of the Dent du Midi ; on the opposite side the long range of purple Juras, with their nestling white villages and their deep mysterious-looking ravines ; and to the left the town of Geneva itself, looking picturesque enough from here, with the ancient towers of the Cathedral dominating all the other buildings ; and backed by the precipitous cliffs of the Salève. It was an enchanting scene—a scene of immense extent, of great variety, and embracing all the feature requisite to make a perfect landscape—waters, woodland, dells, and hills.

La Garence had for some years been untenanted owing to the high rent demanded for it. It was fast falling into decay when at last it was taken on a lease by the agent of a gentleman who with his wife and one child had been residing for some time in the south of France. This gentleman was described as a Hungarian refugee. He was a nobleman, and was known as Count Matriskie. In due course the Count

and his family arrived and took up their residence at La Garence. They were accompanied by three servants, two females and a man. One of the females was a Russian peasant woman called Katrina, who acted as *bonne* or nurse to the child.

Very soon after their arrival it began to be whispered that there was some mystery about this family. They never visited, and the only visitors they received were some of the leading Russians who had long lived in the town. They never left their house, and nobody save their own immediate acquaintances ever saw them. But as they paid their way and spent freely the Genevese troubled themselves not about them, because your true Genevese cares nothing as to what the foreigner may be so long as he gets his money ; for the life-long dream of the Genevese is money, and he regards the foreigner as his natural prey. Soon after his arrival Count Matriskie increased his household by adding two Russian servants, a man and a woman who had lived for some time in Geneva, and who were known by the name of Fincke—Paul Fincke and his wife Julia. But the servants of the Count's ménage were as silent and mysterious as their master, and nobody could learn who the Count was, what his origin was, how he derived his means, or why he had come to reside in Geneva. Count Matriskie was a little man with black hair, a swarthy complexion, and an air of deep and settled melancholy in his face. His wife was much younger than he, a mere girl in fact, and singularly handsome. They had one child, a boy of about two years of age.

Many months passed, during which neither the Count nor his wife was ever known to leave the villa where they resided. Naturally, many rumours and stories were spread about in reference to them, and one of these rumours said that the Count was not Hungarian at all, but a Russian of very high rank, a member of one of the best Russian families, and an ex-military officer, while the lady was said

to be indirectly connected with the then reigning Czar. What ground there was for this rumour was not stated, but such was the talk of the town. The Count seldom received letters, and never posted any, and this fact, which could not be kept secret, only served to add to the mystery. It was known, however, that some of the most prominent Russians resident in Geneva were in the habit of visiting at La Garence, and it was whispered that the Count received his correspondence and despatched his letters through a third person, and that this precaution was observed to prevent the Count's identity being known. Of course, it was but natural that speculation and curiosity should be aroused about people who secluded themselves so strangely as did the Count and his wife. But nothing compromising was known against them. Their papers were all *en règle*, and their *permis de séjour* had been readily granted by the authorities.¹

So far, then, the Count was in an unassailable position. Gossips might clatter, and curiosity-mongers feel deeply injured because they could not pry into the affairs of this foreign resident, but he was not affected by it. For reasons best known to himself he chose to lead a secluded life, and his wife—young, beautiful, and accomplished—shared his seclusion, although she might have mixed in the whirl of life, and have been the admired of all admirers, for her beauty would have won her devoted followers. Their child was a fine boy, with his father's darkness and his mother's beauty. He was well cared for and delicately nurtured. Their servants were all devoted to the family, inasmuch as they betrayed no confidences, and no one could worm from them any of the secrets of La Garence.

At the top of the Count's house were three or four *greniers*, as they are termed in the country, but which in England are known as garrets. One of these the Count had

¹ Before a foreigner can settle in any part of Switzerland he must obtain permission known as a *permis de séjour* from the authorities, and deposit his passports at the Hotel de Ville of the town.

fitted up as a chemical laboratory, for he was a student of chemistry, and he spent many hours of his life amongst his crucibles and retorts, working often far into the night until, weary and jaded, he would creep to his bed as the lessening darkness proclaimed the dawn of day.

The laboratory was sacred to the Count. No one was allowed to enter it excepting his wife, and one or two of the people who were in the habit of visiting him. The laboratory had secrets, but they were as well kept as were the secrets of himself and his family.

One evening he was occupied in his laboratory when his wife went to him. She looked troubled and anxious, and as she threw her arms round his neck she burst into tears. It was some minutes before he was able to console her.

"Danioff is below," she said. "He has come for the compound." She burst into tears again, and exclaimed, "Oh, Nicholas, when will this dreadful business end? Better far that we lived as peasants on some mountain top than lead the lives we are leading now. Let us fly from here. Let us go to England, to France, to the Arctic regions, anywhere so long as we can break these terrible bonds and rest in peace and security."

"Ah, my beloved Isobel," he answered sadly, and caressing her with great affection, "it cannot be yet. Neither the Arctic regions nor the desert wilds of Africa could preserve us from the vengeance of the brotherhood if we proved traitors to the cause. I would fly to-morrow if I thought we could find a place of safety."

"Let us try," she whispered, in a voice broken with emotion; "for our child's sake let us try. To live ever thus in the shadows is awful. We cannot call our souls our own. We are surrounded with an atmosphere of mystery, and the social intercourse and social enjoyments of other people are denied to us."

"It is so; it is so," he murmured with a sigh.

"Then let us alter it," she urged. "Better bread alone and some of the brightness of life than dwelling thus on the edge of a seething volcano, into which at any moment we may be plunged. We are growing old before our time. The constant strain upon our nerves, the constant dread and fear are putting lines in our faces and whitening our hair before ever we have tasted any of the joys of the world."

He smiled sadly as he gazed in the beautiful face upturned to his and kissed the rounded white forehead.

"It would need a powerful microscope, Isobel, my beloved," he said, "to detect the wrinkles in your face or the grey amongst your own superb dark tresses. But endure yet a little longer. I am biding my time, and waiting my opportunity. As you know, I have little sympathy with the cause, and, were it not for our darling child's sake, I would expose the plot to-morrow. Patience, patience, sweet, the time will come."

She was about to make some reply, but, casting her eyes towards the doorway, she uttered a little scream of alarm, for standing there was a dark, scowling, sinister-looking man, whose face seemed soured with disappointment, and whose expression was one of bitter cynicism.

"Ah, Danioff!" exclaimed the Count with a little start, fearing that the words he had addressed to his wife had been overheard by the intruder.

"Excuse me, Count," said Danioff apologetically, "but, being in a hurry, and as madame seemed a long time, I took the liberty of coming up. I hope I do not intrude?"

"No, no," returned the Count, betraying nervousness in his voice. "Come in and find a seat." Then turning to his wife, he kissed her, and said—"Leave us, my dear, and prepare some tea for Monsieur Danioff."

The Countess withdrew reluctantly, Danioff standing on one side and bowing as she passed.

"How charming Madame la Comtesse looks to-day,"

Danioff remarked, while a strange sneer played about his mouth.

"Yes, yes, she is always charming, but have you any news?" said the Count hurriedly, and showing that he had not yet regained his composure.

"No, except that all goes well. But have you prepared the compound?"

"Yes; it is ready."

As the Count spoke he opened a cupboard built in the wall, and took therefrom a tin tube about twelve inches long. It had a cap on. He removed this and drew forth a cylinder nearly as long as the tube, and made of green glass. It was fitted with a stopper, and over that again a metal cap that screwed on to the glass, and kept the stopper in its place. The Count held the bottle up to the light. It was filled with a clear transparent fluid. He agitated it a little, and examined it critically.

"Yes, it will do," he remarked, as he restored the bottle to the tin case. Then from a box that stood on his table he took a small phial also capped with metal. The phial contained an amber-coloured and viscid fluid. "In preparing the bombs," he said, "you must be careful that each is divided into two compartments, each compartment must then be filled with sawdust. Then into one compartment you pour a teaspoonful of the fluid from the green bottle; and into the other two drops only of the amber fluid. Do not mix the two liquids by themselves, that is, without the sawdust, or an instant and violent explosion would result. The sawdust prevents that, and it is only when the bombs are thrown and the percussion caps strike that an explosion can be produced; but then so powerful and violent that nothing can live within a dozen yards of it. As you are aware, I have spent years in perfecting this discovery, and I now place in the hands of the Brotherhood a tremendous and deadly weapon, and I pray to God that it may never be used against any but our country's enemies."

"The thanks of the Fraternity are due to you, Monsieur le Comte," Danioff replied, with a smile of satisfaction.

A few minutes afterwards he had taken his departure, and then the Count descended and joined his wife in the salon. She was greatly agitated, and had evidently been weeping.

"Has Danioff gone?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Do you think," she asked with a shudder, "do you think, Nicholas, that he heard what we said as he stood at the door of the grenier?"

"I don't know," responded the Count thoughtfully. "I hardly think so. But for our dear boy's sake we must be more guarded. If we were suspected my death and yours would be certain, and perhaps even the child would be sacrificed. I conjure you, however, that if anything should happen to me that you will give no sign and utter no word that would lead to discoveries being made by the police. On your silence would depend your life and the life of the beloved child."

He spoke in a tone of great sadness, and as if from prophetic instinct, and his wife, falling on his breast, wept bitterly and moaned—

"You speak as if moved by some apprehension of coming danger. Oh, my husband, let us fly from here. Let us go to London. England is the land of liberty, and we should surely be safe there."

The Count smiled sadly as he warmly embraced his wife.

"Calm yourself, my sweet," he said, "your fears are groundless. Even if Danioff did overhear any of our conversation, I do not think he would betray us, seeing that I have now placed in the hands of the Brotherhood the explosive that has cost me so much thought and trouble and risk to invent. I am valuable to my colleagues, and I do not think they will be in a hurry to get rid of me."

"No, unless they suspect you of being inclined to betray them. Remember that you have been suspected before and warned, and should Danioff have heard anything and reports it at headquarters, your life will be in danger."

The Count laughed, but it was evident that it was a forced laugh, and his careworn face gave evidence in its anxious, nervous expression what the true state of his feelings were. But he consoled his wife, who presently grew calmer, and at his request she sat down at the piano and played several pieces with exquisite grace and feeling, and the touch of an accomplished musician.

CHAPTER II.

THE KISS OF DEATH.

A WEEK after the little incident at La Garence, the Count received by private messenger the following letter, which was written in cipher :—

"A meeting of great importance will be held at the house of our brother at Montbrillant¹ to-night soon after twelve o'clock. Your presence is necessary. Fail not to come. A boat will be in waiting opposite your residence at midnight to convey you across the lake. *By order of the Executive Council.*"

As the Count read this missive his face blanched and a nervous tremor ran through him, for his first idea was that he was suspected of being false to the cause he had espoused, and that his life was menaced. He tried to shake off this feeling, however, and turning to the messenger, said in a pleasant tone—

"Good ; I will attend."

The man bowed.

"Will Monsieur le Comte destroy the summons ?"

"Ah, certainly," the Count remarked, as he tore the

¹ Montbrillant is a scattered district on the north side of the lake, and about two miles from Geneva. Many prominent Nihilists had their residence there, and up to a quite recent period a secret printing press existed at Montbrillant, and from it issued hundreds of thousands of inflammatory pamphlets which were smuggled into and scattered broadcast through Russia.

paper into minute fragments, and threw them into the empty fireplace.

"If Monsieur le Comte will pardon me, I will get rid of the letter more effectually," said the man as, stooping down, and taking a sulphur match from his pocket, he rubbed it on his trousers until it broke into a blue flame, which he applied to the pieces of paper, and watched them consume to ashes.

The Count was not surprised at this action, as he was well aware that one of the rules of the Brotherhood was that all communications of that nature should be utterly destroyed.

The man rose and bowed again.

"Has Monsieur le Comte any commands?" he asked.

"No. Adieu."

The man took his departure, and the Count, without saying anything to his wife, went up to his laboratory and tried to occupy his mind with some experiments he was engaged in. But he could not absorb himself as was his wont. His thoughts would revert to that letter and its peremptory command, and, in spite of himself, he felt uneasy. On two occasions only since he came to live in Geneva had he been summoned to attend a meeting, but on each occasion it had been in the town. He knew that a zealous and moving spirit of the fraternity lived close to Montbrillant, in a lonely district where there were only a few scattered houses, not far from the shore of the lake on the other side. And so, when he came to reason the thing out, it seemed to him not unreasonable after all that a meeting should be held there; and, by crossing the lake in a boat, not only would they avoid attracting attention, for the lake was utterly deserted at that hour of the night, but a walk of at least six miles from his house would be saved.

On reasoning the matter out thus, he was enabled to dispel his fears and to concentrate his attention upon his work.

That evening, as the Count and Countess dined *tête-à-tête* as was their custom, he was prompted several times to tell

her of the summons he had received ; but checked himself, fearing to alarm her, for she had been in fear and dread ever since the incident with Danioff the preceding week. She knew that Danioff was a fanatical devotee of the cause, and, if he had overheard anything, and had had his suspicions aroused, he would be almost certain to report it to the Council, which was a mysterious body, since no one seemed to know who composed it. All orders were issued in its name, and its power, so far as the Fraternity was concerned, was absolute. This thought naturally caused the Countess great uneasiness, because she was aware that the Count's fidelity had already been doubted, and he had been warned. As a matter of fact he was anxious to withdraw from the Brotherhood, for his heart was not with the cause. He had gone into it with enthusiasm at first, but thoughtlessly. Now when too late he would have severed the connection. Anything like confirmation therefore of the suspicions that had been entertained against him might place his life in peril. As day after day passed, however, and she heard nothing, the Countess became reassured, and regained her wonted cheerfulness—that is, cheerfulness by comparison, for, as she had observed, she lived ever in the shadows, and the sunshine of life touched her not.

She was devoted to her husband, and adored him, while her child was her idol. The Count had espoused the cause of Nihilism some years before, but after a time he had seen reason to change his views considerably. His wife had never been converted to the views of the Nihilists. But she had been guided by her husband, and for his dear sake had held her peace.

On this particular evening he lingered over his dinner in order to enjoy her company longer. And when it was finished he played cards with her until nearly eleven o'clock, when she complained of feeling fatigued.

"You had better retire, my darling," he said, as he kissed her very warmly. "I am going to spend an hour or two in

the laboratory, for I wish to complete some experiments I have begun. But that must not deprive you of your rest."

As it was no unusual thing for him to carry on his studies until far into the night she was not in any way surprised, and so returning his embraces, and urging him not to sit up too long, she went to her chamber. For a time the Count remained in the sitting-room, where he had some black coffee brought to him, and he told the servant he should not require anything more that night. He smoked several cigarettes, and as the hour of midnight drew on his misgivings somehow returned. Do what he would he could not shake off a nervous depression that fastened upon him. And he had such a feeling of coming evil that he procured writing materials from the *escritoire*, and penned the following note to his wife :—

"MY BELOVED ISOBEL,—I have been summoned to attend a meeting to-night, and a strange fear seems to possess me. If I do not return you will know that the worst has happened ; but for your own sake and our sweet child's sake you must make no inquiries, and seek not to learn anything, for if you aroused suspicion against yourself you too would be sacrificed. Be cautious and silent. I hope to return in a few hours, but I write this in case my worst fears are realized."

He sealed the letter up, addressed it to his wife, and placed it conspicuously in the frame of the mirror in the Countess's boudoir. Then he crept silently to the door of her bedroom and listened, until he had assured himself that she slept. She was a very sound sleeper, and so he entered on tiptoe, and went to the cot in which his child reposed beside the Countess's bed. He stooped down and kissed the boy, and then for some moments stood contemplating his sleeping wife, bending over her at last and touching her lips with his. She moved slightly, and he hurried out of the room.

He descended to the hall, wrapped himself in a large cloak, and put on a slouched hat of soft felt. Then he opened the door, lingered and hesitated for some moments, but at length closed the door silently behind him, and went out.

The night was very still ; very solemn. A young moon shed a soft, effulgent light from behind piled up banks of fleecy clouds.

The Count walked rapidly down to the water and listened. The little wavelets caused by intermittent puffs of wind made a melancholy sound as they lapped the shingle. But beyond that sound there was nothing. About twenty yards away he saw a boat on the beach. He hurried to it, and three men sprang up.

"Monsieur le Comte, we salute you," said one of them.

The Count bowed.

"How long will it take us to pull across ?" he asked.

"About three-quarters of an hour," was the answer.

The Count stepped into the boat, which was then pushed off. Two of the men took the oars ; while the third man seated himself at the tiller. The rowers, who were evidently practised hands, pulled in unison, and the boat shot forward rapidly.

The men did not speak. The Count was absorbed with his own thoughts, and his companions made no attempt to disturb them. The middle of the lake was reached, and then the rowers, as if by preconcerted signal, stopped and rested on their oars. The moon was at this time partially obscured, and gusts of wind were sweeping down the lake with a mournful sound, and breaking the surface of the water up into waves. Suddenly, with marvellous agility and dexterity, the man at the tiller threw a silken cord round the Count's neck. One of the other men sprang forward at the instant, and before the unfortunate Count could offer any resistance he was strangled into silence and helplessness. He struggled a little, but his assailants were

too bold and too powerful for his struggles to be of any avail. The cord was tightened with pitiless cruelty. In five minutes the unfortunate victim was insensible ; in another five minutes he was dead. The murderers then proceeded to strip him and to cut off his beard and moustache, evidently with the idea of destroying his identity in case the body should be found. A sack was next drawn over the head and shoulders, coming down as far as the waist, and round the sack cords were wound. A small, square, ivory tablet, on which was painted the word *Traître* (traitor), was fastened on to the breast part of the sacking, and this done, the corpse was thrown into the lake. The clothes were thrust into a smaller sack, which was weighted with a heavy stone that the murderers had brought with them, and it was then thrown overboard. Their hellish work completed, the men resumed their seats and pulled to the north shore, where they landed, restoring the boat to a little bay whence it had been taken, and that done they disappeared in the darkness.

When the Countess awoke in the morning she saw that her husband's bed had not been slept in, and so, slipping on her dressing-gown, she went up to his laboratory. Not finding him there, she sent one of the servants to see if he was walking about in the grounds, as was his wont sometimes in the early morning. When word came that he could not be found in the garden, she grew a little uneasy herself, though not really alarmed. But when she had performed her toilet, she went into her boudoir and found the letter he had put into the frame of the mirror. Then her heart turned to stone. And when the day had well advanced, and there were still no tidings of him, her worst fears were realized, and she knew then that his fate had been sealed. She resolved, however, to obey his injunctions, for what else could she do ?

Her faithful servants, Paul and Julia Fincke, she took into her counsel. This man and woman were Russian

peasants, and imbued with the spirit of Nihilism, but they loved the Countess, and remained staunch to her. They advised her to seek safety in flight, and with a sense of unutterably awful despair she commenced to make her preparations. For her child's sake she bore up. For his sake she would keep silent about her husband's disappearance, and for his sake she would go away. She would go to England, she thought, where she felt sure she would be secure even from the far-reaching arm of Nihilism.

Four days later the body of Count Matriskie was found in the *Perte du Rhone*.^{*} The murderers quite intended that the body should be found, otherwise they would have weighted it. That a crime had been committed was certain. That was proved by the tablet with the word *traitor* and by the sack bound with cords, which enveloped the upper part of the body. The police guessed at once that the crime was due to Nihilism, and on that account they were almost hopeless of tracing the perpetrators, for they knew that amongst the vast organization no man or woman could be found who would betray the secrets of the Fraternity, no matter what inducement or what reward might be held out. The body being naked there was nothing to lead to identification. The hair being cut off the face had so changed the

^{*} The *Perte du Rhone* (the loss of the Rhone) is a few miles from Geneva. It is so called because at one time the river was here lost to sight, as it passed under tremendous overhanging rocks. This is no longer the case, however, as the construction of the railway to Paris necessitated the blasting away of the rocks; nevertheless, a large hollow kind of basin still remains, and as the river takes a great bend here the basin is filled with the back water which sucks everything into it. Suicides are very frequent in the Rhone, and the bodies are always found at the Perte, which a man is specially told off to visit periodically, his duty being to report immediately that a body comes into the basin. It is a singular fact that any one drowned near the centre or deepest parts of the lake is never recovered. The supposition is that the body becomes fixed among the jagged rocks which form the bed of the lake. A body falling into the water, however, near Geneva is certain to be swept down to the Perte if it escapes observation before reaching that point.

appearance of the Count that no one who was not very familiar with him would have recognized him.

The poor blanched and sodden body, with the deep marks about the throat showing that he had been strangled, was taken to the Morgue, where it was exposed to public gaze, and a description was widely circulated ; but no one came forward to claim the remains. The crime naturally caused a sensation in the town, and crowds of light-hearted and merry people visited the Morgue, and many were the speculations as to who the victim was and why he had been murdered.

Mysterious crimes of this nature were by no means uncommon at the period we are dealing with.

On the third and last day of the public exposure of the body previous to its being committed to a nameless grave, a woman dressed in black and closely veiled entered the Morgue. She attracted no particular attention. The surging crowd jostled her, but she made no sign, and in a few moments passed out again. An hour later she returned. The attention of the gendarme on duty was then attracted, and he kept his eyes upon her. She was seen to approach the corpse and stand over it motionless for some moments. Then she very slightly lifted the edge of her veil so as to leave the lips free, and, bending down, she kissed the cold and pallid face. The action was quickly done, but it could not escape observation. She was heard to utter a choking sob as she hurried away. The gendarme could not leave, and nearly fifteen minutes elapsed before he was enabled to get a garde de paix, or policeman, and instruct him to follow the woman, for it was evident by that kiss she had recognized the murdered man, and could no doubt give information that would lead to the arrest of the assassins.

The woman, however, had got a fair start, and as darkness was already closing in, the garde de paix could not get on her track. She, in fact, did not intend that any one should, for she walked rapidly through the mazy streets of the old town, doubling backwards and forwards, and threading her

way in and out of the narrow alleys and courts. She came out at last on the "Bastion," where seats abound under the trees. Here she rested, for she was exhausted; but the many stragglers did not notice her, as the daylight had already faded out, and the thickly-foliaged trees made all gloomy beneath them. While she sat there the garde de paix was wandering about in the old town. He was looking for the needle in the truss of hay, and was not likely to find it.

The veiled woman sat for half-an-hour quite, during which time she frequently wiped her eyes, for she was fretting bitterly. She rose at last. The night had fallen, and the moon was struggling to break forth from heavy masses of clouds that hung over the Salève.

The woman now walked slowly, as if tired and jaded. She bent her steps towards the Avenue Malagnau, striking off from there by one of the cross roads which connect with the Route de Chêne. Along this route she continued until she reached the beautiful and lonely country road known as the Grange Canal.

During all this time her steps had been dogged, but not by the garde de paix. That smart functionary, having failed to get tale or tidings of the person he was searching for, had dived into an estaminet to refresh himself with half a litre of red wine and a cigarette. The person who had followed her was a dark complexioned, low browed man, who had been amongst the crowd at the Morgue. He had seen her act of kissing the corpse, and from that moment he had scarcely taken his eyes off her, but followed her silently and surely like her shadow.

"The Grange Canal is a beautiful road, with only one or two lonely farmhouses upon it. It connects with another road that descends rapidly to the lake, for the Grange Canal is nearly two hundred feet higher than the lake. Tall trees shade the road, which is quite without lamps save for the first quarter of a mile. After that it is weird and lonely. Nevertheless, the veiled woman made her way along it, and

she could have but one intention is so doing, that intention being to reach the lake. The man who followed evidently divined her intention, and getting over the hedge on one side of the road, he hurried through the fields so as to anticipate her arrival at a large open space where several roads converge—what is known as the Route de Frontenex, going to Geneva on the one hand, and towards the mountains on the other, while a third road is the one alluded to which descends to the lake. At this space is a stone seat and a signpost indicating the routes.

The man reached this spot before the woman ; and he sat down on the seat. In a few minutes approaching footsteps warned him that she was coming. The spot was as lonely as could be well imagined. Not a living soul, save this man and woman, was near. All was weirdly silent, save for the rustling of the great chestnut trees, which abound. As the woman came up, she evidently had the intention of resting on the seat, but the man stepped forward and confronted her. She uttered a little cry of alarm, and drew back.

"This is a late hour, madame, for you to be here in such a lonely place," he observed.

"Yes," she faltered, in trembling accents, "I have been in the town on business, but I am going to my home."

"You are," he answered, significantly, "you are going to your long home."

With a quick movement he raised his arm, and fired at her with a revolver, and the bullet pierced her heart. She uttered no cry ; only a gasp and a gurgle came from her lips. Then she threw up her arms, reeled, and fell backwards on to the grass, and was still. The man put his weapon into his pocket, and stooped down to assure himself that he had effectually done his work. Of that there was not the slightest doubt, and being assured he sped away into the darkness ; while the pale moon, emerging from a silvery cloud, looked down on the white, upturned face of the Countess Matriskie, that was beautiful even in death.

THE STORY EIGHTEEN YEARS AFTERWARDS.



CHAPTER I.

SCHMIDT AND SONS OF ZURICH.

As Geneva is the capital of French Switzerland, so Zurich is the capital of German Switzerland. The two cities are strong rivals, and strongly jealous of each other, but while the commercial prosperity of Geneva has for many years been declining, that of Zurich has increased.

The town of Zurich, like its rival, is built on the shores of a lake, but the palm for beauty must certainly be given to Lake Léman, which has aroused the enthusiasm of poets and artists in all ages. Nevertheless, the Lake of Zurich has a charm peculiarly its own, while the town may in many respects take precedence over its French rival. It is divided by the River Limmat, neither as blue nor as swift as the famed Rhone; but a quiet, steady-going, peaceful river, with charming walks on its banks, which are much beloved by the young Zurichois and Zurichoise, who find here meet spots in which to whisper their honied tales. Zurich is a more extensive town than Geneva, and it climbs about the hills and dives down into hollows in a very eccentric and remarkable fashion. From almost any part of the town in clear weather may be seen the long line of glittering

snow peaks of the Bunder Oberland or the Vorderrheinthal, in which region the mighty Rhine has its birth. Standing on any of the higher parts of the town on a summer's day, and taking in with a bird's-eye view the whole of the beautiful valley of the Limmat, with its hamlets and villages, its golden cornfields, its rich orchards, for which this part of the country is famed, its smiling vineyards, the lake like a vast sheet of burnished silver, in which the towns that stud its banks are reflected, while far off on the horizon glitters the snowy Alpine chain, it must be admitted that the panorama thus unfolded to the wondering gaze is magnificent. To the south-west of the town, and at a distance of about five miles, rises the long tableland known as the Uetliberg, which is nearly 3,000 feet above the sea, and from the summit of this mountain the view is entrancing.

The firm of Schmidt and Sons, ironfounders and machinists, of Zurich, was an important house at the time this story begins. The founder of it, Fritz Schmidt, had begun life as a humble peasant. His father and mother were "land-owners," as many of the Swiss peasants are—that is, they owned a few acres of ground, and it took all the exertions of every member of the family, working like slaves, winter and summer, spring and autumn, early and late, to get sufficient out of their acres to keep bare body and soul together. Young Fritz was one of seven children, and being a little shrewder, and having somewhat more brains than his brothers and sisters, he determined not to pass his life amongst the cow-dung and mud of the paternal acres, but to aim at something higher. With this praiseworthy object in view, he apprenticed himself to a blacksmith, and learnt the trade; and as soon as he became a journeyman he went to Zurich, which, to his peasant mind at that time, was *El Dorado*—the City of the World!

In Zurich he got a situation with a blacksmith and ironmonger. In five years' time he became a partner; married

his master's daughter, Fräulein Anna Gottschalk ; and on the death of her father soon after succeeded to the business. Anna Gottschalk was a very proud young woman, and firmly believed that if her father was not a duke, a prince, or a royal or titled personage of some sort, he ought to have been. And she considered that in bestowing her hand and heart on Fritz Schmidt she had displayed singular magnanimity and condescension. It is more probable, however, that she had the best of the bargain, for Fritz was destined to develop and extend the business till it grew into a most important commercial concern. A family was born to him—three sons and a daughter. One of the sons died in his youth through an accident. The others grew up and became partners in the business ; and Fritz, the peasant, having done his duty in life well, and carried out his resolve, went to his well-earned rest, sincerely lamented by a numerous circle of friends, and leaving a widow and three children to mourn his loss.

Widow Schmidt appeared to be disconsolate and inconsolable for some time after her husband's death ; but nevertheless she did not take her tearful eyes off the business, which, with the aid of her sons, she commenced to still further develop. She also caused to be painted on the panels of her brougham a coat-of-arms. Herr Schmidt had indulged in a brougham in his later years ; but all his wife's persuasions, protestations, arguments, and even commands, could never induce him to put on a coat-of-arms. He used to say jocularly that if he lent himself to any such vanity his arms would have to be a pitchfork and a dung barrow. This always offended the patrician notions of his good wife ; and so within three months after her dear man's death she avenged herself by adorning her carriage with a pretentious design, in which a helmet and a clenched hand grasping a dagger, and two lions couchant, on a shield, figured.

Widow Schmidt in personal appearance was not an unattractive woman, though possessed of a superabundance

of adipose matter. In other words, the widow was abnormally stout, but she had a pleasant face with regular features, and dark hair that was just showing incipient signs of greyness.

Her two sons were young men of a commonplace type. They had been a little fast, and more than a little wild, and the probabilities are that had it not been for the tact, the will, and the shrewd business habits of their mother they would soon have made ducks and drakes of everything. By firmness and judicious treatment, however, she had gradually brought them under control, and they readily co-operated with her on their father's death, and began to display some of the paternal aptitude for business and money-making. These two young men were named respectively Fritz and Peter, Fritz being the senior by four years, and at this time he was eight-and-twenty years of age. He inherited his mother's vanity, and had a very exalted notion of his own standing in society, as well as of his abilities.

His brother, on the other hand, was a plodder, and less ambitious. As long as he got all he wanted he cared little about position, or even personal appearance, for he was somewhat slovenly in his habits, but he was possessed of strong commercial instincts, and could drive a bargain very keenly.

The other and most important member of the family, in many respects, was the daughter Bertha, and it is upon her that much of the interest of this history turns. Bertha at the time of her father's death was a little over eighteen, and nature had endowed her with more than an ordinary share of good looks. If she was not exactly strikingly handsome, she was beyond all doubt a very beautiful girl, with a soft velvety complexion, dark, bright eyes, and a great quantity of brown hair.

From the very moment of the girl's birth Frau Schmidt determined to "make a lady of her," to use her own expression, and she never lost sight of that resolve during the

girl's development. In her earliest infancy she was given into the charge of an Alsatian *bonne*, for Frau Schmidt, believing herself to be a "member of society," would have considered it a gross insult to her dignity to give such maternal care to her offspring as an English mother would bestow. And so for the first month or two the atom of humanity, Bertha Schmidt, was, in accordance with continental fashion, swathed like a mummy, tied up in a bag, covered with a costly robe of white satin and Brussels lace, then placed on an elegant cushion of velvet and gold, and thus pompously paraded about by the gorgeously attired Alsatian *bonne*.

At five years of age little Bertha gave evidence of being a smart and precocious child, and her fond mother procured a governess for her, who began to instil into her wondering mind some rudimentary knowledge, and by time she was twelve she was very much farther advanced than many girls of her class a great deal older.

Now, the ambition of every Swiss mother who has means and children is that the daughters shall become *pensionnaires* in a first-class school, and accordingly Bertha, before she was thirteen, was placed in a very pretentious educational establishment situated in the Swiss capital, Berne, which has always borne a high reputation for schools, as it was in Berne that the celebrated Pestalozzi founded his system of teaching, which has since been adopted throughout the country.

Frau Schmidt was exceedingly proud about her daughter being at school in Berne, and never lost an opportunity of referring to "our dear child who is pursuing her studies in the capital."

As Bertha developed she gave promise of cleverness. She became a fair musician, displayed a talent for drawing and painting, and an ability to succeed in most things that she set her mind to, and being good-looking in addition it can readily be conceived with what pride her mother regarded

her. In fact the good lady liked to think of her daughter as a young woman of transcendent abilities, of super-excellent virtues, and possessed of beauty that outrivalled that of some of the most renowned beauties of the world. And the fond and vain mother who had sighed for social rank, and would have given half her fortune could she have secured a *Von*² for the family name, was never tired of saying that her daughter should make a great marriage. Her *dot* (dowry) should be sufficiently large to attract penniless lords, dukes, counts, marquises, and even princes; and from amongst this collection of titled beggars, a suitable selection would be made, for the girl should have a fortune of at least one million francs.

Thus the poor woman dreamed, and fondly hoped that her dreams would be realized. She knew the name of nearly every unmarried young man of title in Europe, and her eyes were ever turned wistfully to that great army of German pauper princes which has supplied titles to so many heiresses in various parts of the world.

Frau Schmidt lived with her family at Horgen, a few miles from Zurich, on the shore of the lake. Horgen was the fashionable quarter, and was much resorted to by the wealthy merchants and shopkeepers of Zurich. Here, in her elegant villa, known as Beau Séjour, the designing widow was in the habit of giving weekly receptions, taking care, so far as she could, that her guests should represent such rank and fashion as the very mercantile town of Zurich produced. The quality of the article, however, was not such as to satisfy the widow's critical tastes. Wealthy shopkeepers, retired tallowmakers, and rich tailors were not of the class that Frau Schmidt dreamed about when thinking of her daughter, but though she made many and desperate efforts, she could not succeed in drawing into her net the titled personages she wanted. Still she did not despair, and she resolved that each of her sons should

² "Von" is a German prefix of nobility.

at different periods make a tour of Europe, when, possibly, he might be able to form the acquaintance of a suitable man to wed his sister. This was a bold scheme, but the widow was a bold woman, and not likely to stick at trifles in order to realize the dearest wishes of her heart.

In the meantime the Fräulein, Bertha Schmidt, all unconscious of her mother's daring designs, was diligently pursuing her studies at Berne, and abandoning herself to all the frivolities and gaieties peculiar to a first-class pensionnat in Switzerland. It is needless to say these frivolities and gaieties were of a very mild character. But one thing that Bertha did would certainly not have been considered harmless by her mother. In fact, had that lady been aware of it there is no telling to what length her passionate indignation would have carried her. This thing was nothing less than the receipt weekly, and in a secret manner, of a letter. The weekly letter was written by a young man, and was couched in strains of the warmest love. Fräulein Bertha devoured these letters, as the saying is. She read them over and over again, until she could repeat them by heart, and then she cut them into minute pieces and burnt the pieces, so as to destroy every atom of evidence of her clandestine correspondence. And always on the day following the receipt of her love-letter she despatched a reply to it. And the language she employed was no less eloquent of burning love than was the one she received.

And so, while the widow Schmidt was resolving to ransack Europe in search of a titled nonentity for her daughter, the daughter was carrying on a secret love correspondence with some unknown man, and all day long she thought of him, and at night she fondly dreamed of him.

CHAPTER II.

AMONGST THE ROSES.

FRAU SCHMIDT had a great many people in her employ ; or rather, the firm of Schmidt and Sons had. The wage-sheet that was made up every Friday had to provide for the payment of close on a thousand hands. In his later years Herr Schmidt had added locomotive building to the other branches of his trade, and this had brought a very large increase of business.

Amongst the employés was a very clever young workman by the name of Joseph Courrette, who was the only son of some humble people who were not natives of but had lived in Zurich for many years.

Of the antecedents of the Courrettes nothing was known. They themselves were singularly reticent in regard to their history, and though they spoke German fluently, they were nevertheless supposed to be foreigners. Be that as it might, they were quiet, inoffensive people, who kept themselves to themselves, paid their way, and had won the respect of their neighbours. They lived on the outskirts of the town in a little cottage standing in about an acre of ground. They had bought this small property when they first came to live in Zurich, and Courrette, senior, cultivated the little patch of ground, growing fruit and vegetables thereon and selling them in the market.

Joseph Courrette had received a good plain education at one of the public schools for which Switzerland is

famous, and for some years he had been an apprentice in the firm of Schmidt and Sons, where he had become a general favourite owing to his geniality, his quiet unobtrusive habits, and his cleverness as a workman. He was a very studious youth, and particularly fond of books. Scientific works especially had an attraction for him, and by this means he stored his mind with a great deal of useful information.

Frau Schmidt had taken a particular fancy to Joseph almost from the moment that he entered into the employment of the firm. He was so quiet, so orderly, so regular, so persevering, and studious. But apart from these things, although they counted for much with the Frau, he had something else to recommend him to the attention of a woman. He was handsome. He had a spare lithe figure, a little below the medium height, but a singularly pleasing face, with a frank, open expression, and thoughtful, intelligent eyes. He was dark complexioned, with a mass of curly hair that clustered in tiny ringlets about his high, brown forehead. There was an air of natural refinement about him, too, that commanded respect even from those far above him; and very decided deference from his inferiors. Frau Schmidt had for a long time taken him under her patronage, and petted him a good deal. His trustworthiness naturally begot her confidence, and she often employed him to do little commissions for her, and in return he was frequently invited to Beau Séjour, where the servants were allowed to entertain him.

One of these servants was a good-looking young woman by the name of Anna Strubholtz. She had been in Frau Schmidt's service from childhood, having been left an orphan when quite young. Her mother had been in the service of Frau Schmidt's mother, and so the widow looked upon her as her especial protégé. And though the good lady was very much absorbed in her search for a titled husband for her daughter, she still found time to think about a husband for Anna. She wanted to secure for her a good, steady-going

workman, who could earn a sufficient wage to keep himself and wife comfortably, and to make some little provision for any family that might result from his union. And she had long thought to herself, "The very man I want I have found in Joseph Courrette." Moreover, Anna had been over head and ears in love with Joseph for a long time, but she had concealed her love like a worm in the bud, for Joseph had never given her any encouragement.

Frau Schmidt knew that Anna loved Joseph, and she had promised her that when she married she would give her a *dot* of four thousand francs, besides all the necessary linen to begin housekeeping with.

When Anna sighingly declared that she didn't believe that Joseph would ever take her, the Frau laughed at her fears, and said—

"You are a silly girl to talk like that. I will see that he does take you, and you have only to play your cards well to win him. A young man like that, who can get a girl with four thousand francs and all her household linen, is not likely to turn up his nose at her, more especially when she has good looks, as you have. I have set my mind on marrying you to Joseph, or Joseph to you, whichever way you like to put it, and I am not the woman to turn from a project that I have resolved to accomplish. So you may content yourself, and feel assured that some day you will be Frau Courrette."

Anna Strubholtz was very happy when she heard her mistress talk like this, and she did everything she possibly could to make herself agreeable to Joseph. But he, while very respectful and courteous to her, never showed any partiality for her, which, as may be imagined, distressed her very much; and one day she exclaimed to her mistress confidentially—

"I am sure, Frau Schmidt, that Joseph doesn't care a pin's point for me, and never will!"

"Tut, you silly child, you know nothing at all about it," exclaimed the widow, with some warmth. "His reserve and

bashfulness are natural to him, and I admire him all the more for having such qualities. They prove that he is not likely to be captivated by every pretty face he sets his eyes on. No, no, don't you worry yourself, child. You, together with the four thousand francs, and the household linen, will prove too strong a temptation for him to resist, you may depend upon it, and you may congratulate yourself on the prospect of getting such an excellent husband. You must not forget that Joseph has still six months to run before he is out of his apprenticeship, and I do not wish you and him to marry until he has served his time. Then his wages will be increased, and you will both be able to commence married life fairly well."

Anna was very much encouraged by these words, and shortly afterwards her joy knew no bounds by reason of the following little incident.

It was the month of July, and Fräulein Bertha had come home for her holidays. It happened one evening that she and Anna Strubholtz were in the garden gathering flowers. It was a beautiful evening. All things were touched with the crimson gold of the setting sun. The lake, like burnished brass, flashed back the light, and the snowy range of the distant Alps had blushed into crimson at the warm kiss of the departing God of Day.

The garden of Beau Séjour was not only very extensive, but was a Paradise of flowers, and at this moment it was graced by as pretty an Eve as man's eyes could look upon. Bertha was a picture of feminine beauty, as, clad in a white dress designed to show the graceful outlines of her figure, a large straw hat surmounted with poppies and corn ears, her brown hair straggling in studied negligence about her dainty neck and shoulders, a pretty basket filled with flowers hung on her bare, white, rounded arm, her clear complexion catching the glowing light, she flitted about with her garden scissors, adding to the store already gathered in her dainty basket. And with her was Anna Strubholtz, equally busy

amongst the roses, and looking also very happy and contented. It happened that on this particular evening Joseph Courrette had been doing some little commission for Frau Schmidt, and had just arrived at Horgen, and with the designing artfulness of her sex the widow gave him a light woollen shawl and bade him carry it down the garden, and give it to Fräulein Bertha, and tell her that her mother desired her to wrap it round her shoulders.

As Joseph approached the two girls he removed his cap and bowed, and the sparkle in the girls' eyes, and the slightly heightened colour of their cheeks told that they were both glad to see him. Besides being handsome, Joseph was a graceful youth, with a courteous and singularly dignified bearing.

He delivered his message and the shawl, and after a few pleasant words, seemed to be going, when Bertha exclaimed, "Here, Joseph, gather me a few more roses, for I have pricked my hands dreadfully with the horrible thorns. I am sure I don't know why such beautiful flowers are armed with such cruel spikes."

"To obtain the beautiful in life, Fräulein Bertha, one must generally pass through thorny ways," answered Joseph, with a sigh of delight, as he took the scissors from her white hand, and proceeded to snip off the flowers, carefully cutting the thorns from the stalks as he did so. In a few moments he presented her with a little bunch of blood-red roses, saying the while, "The sweetness of these flowers are shamed by your own sweetness, Fräulein."

Bertha crimsoned but was pleased, and answered—

"You are a flatterer, Master Joseph."

Anna was by, and looked a little astonished, and it might even have been that there was something of jealousy in her expression as she exclaimed, with a toss of her pretty head—

"You have a honied tongue, Joseph, and I dare be sworn many a silly girl, flylike, has been caught by it."

Joseph laughed.

"It is evident then, Anna, that *you* are not silly."

She saw the point of his remark instantly, and blushed to the very roots of her hair ; noticing this, he snipped off an exquisite blush rose from a tree near by, and handing it to her with a bow that would have graced a courtier, he said—

"Deign to accept this flower, Fräulein Anna, for the delicacy of its colouring vies with your own complexion at this moment."

"Fie, fie, Joseph," exclaimed Bertha. "Anna is right. You have a honied tongue."

Anna took the rose with a sense of dreamy delight. Her head swam, and her heart palpitated, for it was the first time he had ever paid her such a compliment, and to her mind it indicated clearly that he admired her. With trembling hands she pinned the flower to the bosom of her dress, and looked at him yearningly from beneath her drooping eyelids. That was one of the happiest moments of her life, and her hopes, which had been sinking, rose rapidly.

The sun went down behind the hills. The lake became a steely blue. The snow mountains flushed a deeper crimson, that gradually faded, leaving a cold, ghastly whiteness behind, and over the vast panorama the darkness of night commenced to gather. The far distances blended with the heavens. The middle distances were clothed in purple gloom, and the foreground was dream-like and indistinct. Still the two girls and Joseph lingered in the garden, but it was not for the sake of gathering any more flowers, for the basket was full to overflowing, and the departing light made it difficult to distinguish the flowers from the trees upon which they grew. Nevertheless the young people lingered, and joked, and laughed, and were very happy.

For Anna it was a sweet time. She followed Joseph's movements with greedy eyes, and she listened to his voice as an enthusiastic musician might listen to sweet sounds of harmony.

Presently Frau Schmidt was heard calling from the

veranda, and telling Bertha to come in, for there was a chill in the night air. Then did Anna sigh, for it told her that the pleasure was over for that evening at least.

Joseph walked between the two girls, bearing the basket of flowers.

"Are you going to take supper with us to-night, Joseph?" Anna asked in an eager tone.

"No; not to-night, Anna; for my mother has a friend supping with her, and as she comes from some distance, I promised to be back in time to escort her home. I shall just be able to do it by taking the last steamer up. It's due here in twenty minutes."

"Ah! no doubt your mother's friend is some young and bewitching female, or you would not be in such a hurry to go back," remarked Anna, somewhat mournfully.

"My mother's friend is on the wrong side of seventy," said Joseph, laughingly.

"Oh, then, you may be trusted," replied Anna.

"I am glad you have so much confidence in me," he remarked, and the silly girl's heart went pit-a-pat again, for to her willing and eager ears his words seemed to indicate that he was certainly in love with her.

Bertha had not joined in the conversation for some minutes, but she had been humming in a very low tone snatches of plaintive, operatic airs. Suddenly she said, for they had got close to the house, "Let us take another turn round the garden."

The suggestion was instantly acted upon, and Anna felt as if she could fall on her young mistress's neck and embrace her for thus prolonging the sweet agony.

They walked round the garden again, chatting and laughing pleasantly, and when they once more came to the house the night had quite closed in and the watching stars shone out from the purple sky.

As Bertha received the basket of flowers from Joseph she said prettily—

"The labourer must have his hire," and she picked from the mass half a dozen roses and gave them to him. He took them quickly, and said—

"Thanks, Fräulein Bertha. I'll prize these for the giver's sake."

Bertha shook hands with Joseph, and then she hurried on to the veranda just as her mother came to call her again.

Anna and Joseph walked round to another entrance, and at that moment the whistle of the approaching steamer warned Joseph that he must go.

"Good night, Anna," he exclaimed, "I shall miss the boat if I don't hurry."

By a sudden impulse she plucked the rose off her breast, the rose that he had given her, and placing it in his hand, she said—"Keep that for the wearer's sake."

He took the flower, kissed her with a suddenness that startled her, and before she had recovered from her surprise she heard the gravel scrunching under his feet as he ran down the path to the little jetty on the other side of the road, for the steamer was already within a few yards of it.

Anna did not see her mistress again that night, but the next day she told her all that had happened. How Joseph had given her a flower, and paid her a pretty compliment, and how, at the last moment, he had, to her amazement, kissed her.

Frau Schmidt smiled a smile of supreme satisfaction as she exclaimed—

"So, so, Master Joseph, I have brought you to book at last have I, my man. Well you may congratulate yourself, Anna. Joseph will make you a good husband, I am convinced. In a little while I will speak to him and tell him that you will have a *dot* of four thousand francs and all your household linen ; and the marriage shall be arranged to take place as soon as ever the lad is out of his apprenticeship. That will be in a very short time now."

Anna's happiness was perfect, and she felt that the world was a very good world and that life was exceedingly sweet.

CHAPTER III.

TELLS HOW A LITTLE SCHEME MISCARRIED.

FRAU SCHMIDT, having a very high opinion of herself, was fond of patronizing those whom she considered beneath her in social status. Nevertheless, she was a good-hearted and generous woman, so long as she was not thwarted in her ambitious and match-making schemes.

She was particularly pleased with herself when she heard Anna's report, and she looked upon the marriage of her servant and Joseph as a certainty.

About two months after the little affair in the rose-garden it was Anna's birthday, and in order to celebrate the event the Frau allowed the servants to have a little merry-making in the shape of a supper and a dance after it. Joseph, of course, was invited, and Bertha, who was at home at the time, graced the dance with her presence.

Frau Schmidt watched Joseph very closely, and she was a little surprised to note how impartial he was in his attentions to the young women present. She would have liked to have seen him show more favour to Anna, who really looked remarkably pretty in her new white dress trimmed with pink ribbon. Bertha danced two or three times during the evening, and for one of these dances she had Joseph for a partner, he having sought permission from her mother. The dance was a waltz, which is the favourite dance in Switzerland, and it was unanimously admitted that a more graceful couple than Joseph and Bertha could not

have been found. After this dance Bertha retired by her mother's orders, and then the good dame took Joseph on one side, and said—

"Joseph, it is Anna's birthday, and she is undoubtedly the belle of the room. I think, therefore, you ought to pay her a little more attention than you have been doing."

"Certainly, if you wish it," said Joseph, with a laugh.

"I do wish it; and tell me, now, don't you think she really looks very pretty to-night?"

"Yes, exceedingly pretty."

Frau Schmidt smiled with self-satisfaction, and was still more satisfied as she observed later on that Joseph was carrying out her wishes, and that Anna appeared to be supremely happy.

As it was late when the little party broke up, it was arranged that Joseph was to have a bed at Beau Séjour, and the next day being Sunday he would not have to go to his work, as the foundry was closed on Sunday, except when there was any special work to do, but as there was not any—think special at this time Joseph would be free, and that was what the widow wanted. So after breakfast she sent word to him that she desired to see him in her private room.

Joseph was not at all surprised at receiving a message of this kind, because Frau Schmidt often entrusted him with a good many little secrets of a kind and it was no unusual thing for her to send for him when he was in the house. She generally saw him, however, in the salon, but on this occasion he was told to go to her private room.

Frau Schmidt's private room was a very elegant and at the same time very practical little place, for the Frau conducted a great deal of business here. She was a thorough business-like and practical woman, and her late husband being fully aware of that had left her the largest share in the business, so that she exercised considerable control over the firm. She had, in fact, the threads of the business in her hands,

and in her small boudoir she kept her own private memoranda and accounts, and looked after the affairs of her various properties, for she was a land and house owner, besides being a partner in the firm.

When Joseph reached the room the Frau was not there, but Bertha was. She was very much surprised to see Joseph in her mother's sanctum, and she exclaimed hurriedly—

"Why, Joseph, whatever are you doing here?"

"Your mother has sent for me," he said, "but for what purpose I know not."

Rather a troubled and anxious look came into Bertha's face as she remarked thoughtfully—

"Whatever can she want with you?"

"Oh, nothing more than usual, I should say. Some commission to perform, I expect."

Bertha was quite in ignorance of her mother's intentions. She had gone to the room to write some letters, and her surprise at seeing Joseph can therefore be imagined.

They had no opportunity for further conversation, as the Frau entered.

"Leave us, dear child, for a little while," she said to Bertha. "I have some business with Joseph."

Bertha appeared to be disappointed, and looked at Joseph rather strangely, while with a pretty pout she said—

"Why should I leave, maman? Is your business with Joseph so dreadfully private?"

"Yes," returned the Frau, decisively. "A little later you shall know all about it, and it will be a little surprise for you."

Joseph was puzzled, for he could make no guess as to what this important business was, and Bertha was not only puzzled, but somewhat annoyed. However, she dare not disobey her mother, and so left the room.

"Sit down," said the Frau to Joseph, who had remained standing. She herself sat down at her large desk, which

was fitted with numerous pigeon-holes and drawers, all of which were stuffed full of papers. By force of habit she took up a pen, dipped it into the ink, and scribbled something on a sheet of paper, but a something that had no earthly bearing on the subject she had in hand.

"Joseph," she began in a solemn manner, as if she was a judge interrogating a prisoner—"Joseph, you are aware that in a few weeks you will be out of your apprenticeship, and as you will then be of full age, you will be your own master."

"Yes, Frau, I am aware of that."

"And what are your plans?" asked the widow.

"Well, I hope to continue with your firm, if you think my services are worth retaining; if not, I should be compelled reluctantly to seek work elsewhere."

"There will be no necessity for that, Joseph," answered the Frau with a pleasant, patronizing smile. "I and my sons are perfectly satisfied with you, and you will have a good engagement given to you."

Joseph's face flushed with pleasurable excitement as he heard this, not altogether on account of the engagement, about which he had never entertained a doubt, but because the Frau's manner and words seemed to assure him that he stood very high in her estimation; and he had very particular reasons for wishing to stand well with her.

"I am exceedingly glad that I have your good opinion and good will," he said.

"Well, Joseph, you've had them for a long time," she returned. "I have taken a motherly interest in you, and I have watched you for years; and latterly, I have seen with great pleasure your growing affection for Anna Strubholtz."

If Joseph had been a prisoner at the bar, and the Frau had really been a judge pronouncing some long sentence of imprisonment, his face could not have gone whiter, and his consternation have appeared greater.

"Really, you are altogether wrong——" he began to

stammer, but the lady, mistaking this for natural bashfulness, interrupted him, and smiling sweetly as was her wont when all seemed to be going according to her wishes, she said—

“Nay, nay ; don’t make any silly excuses, Joseph. I am not blind, you know, and I can see as much as most women. Well, I congratulate you on your choice, for Anna is not only very good-looking, but a most virtuous and industrious girl, and she’ll make you a most excellent wife——”

“But, Frau, you——”

“Now, now, Joseph, do let me finish. Your bashfulness is pardonable, but I hate to be interrupted. Well, now, it is my firm conviction that a steady young man who has a good trade in his hands ought not to remain single. He naturally requires a home and a wife’s care, and if he has these you may depend upon it that he will prosper if he has anything in him, and I know you to be a clever youth, and therefore I have no fear about your future. I have no doubt you have by this time convinced yourself of Anna’s feelings for you, but if you have not, you may accept my assurance that she loves the very ground you walk upon.”

Joseph looked aghast, but the widow seemed absorbed with her subject, and did not notice it, and she rattled on with such volubility that he could not get a chance of speaking, so abandoned himself despairingly to the situation.

“Well, now, as to your marriage,” she continued. “Of course, that is an affair that I do not wish to precipitate, but if you will take my advice you will not delay it longer than is absolutely necessary. You may content your mind as to the start, for I have promised Anna a *dot* of four thousand francs and all the household linen, and in order to mark my appreciation of you I will, on the day of your marriage, present you with the sum of five hundred francs in addition to Anna’s *dot*. You will, therefore, be able to make a very respectable start indeed in married life.”

Joseph could hold his tongue no longer, and he exclaimed with energy—

“Frau, the kindly feeling you display towards me begets in me an emotion that almost deprives me of the power of speech. But even at the risk of offending you—and, God knows, I have no desire to do that—I must tell you that you are mistaken as regards my feelings for Anna. That she is all you represent her to be I know full well, and that she will make a most excellent wife I am convinced ; but she will not be my wife, for I have never loved her, do not love her, and never can love her.”

It was the widow's turn now to look surprised, and not only surprised, but angry, as she asked with sternness—

“And pray, sir, if you do not love the girl why have you encouraged her to bestow her affections upon you ?”

“I have never encouraged her. I assure you, Frau, that you are mistaken.”

“How dare you say such a thing ?” cried the widow sharply. “I repeat emphatically that you have encouraged her, and you have won the poor girl's heart.”

“Alas,” cried Joseph sorrowfully, “if the trifling attention I have sometimes shown her, and such as courtesy demanded, has been the means of leading her to suppose that I had serious intentions, I am truly and deeply grieved. But I solemnly assert that I have never had the slightest desire to mislead Anna, and if she has misinterpreted my little acts of politeness, it is unfortunate, for I have paid her no more attention than any single young man is justified in paying to a young woman.”

Frau Schmidt seemed excessively annoyed. She did not like to have her little schemes frustrated, and it was a blow to her pride, too, to find that she had made such a ludicrous mistake. She did not like to be proved wrong in anything, and her woman's vanity was sorely wounded when she found she had made such an error as this. She had prided herself on having arranged a very pretty plan, and to have

put that plan into practice would have afforded her keen delight. And her liberality, too, as to the *dot*; the household linen, and the five hundred francs to Joseph, seemed to her sufficient inducement for a man, even if Anna had been as ugly as a witch. Her chagrin, therefore, was all the more keen, because she considered that Joseph was an ingrate.

"And pray, sir, what is your objection to Anna?"

"I have not one single particle of objection to her," answered Joseph.

"Then, as I have assured you that the girl loves you, and I am willing to start you comfortably in life, why do you not accept her?"

"It is impossible."

"Impossible! Why impossible?" exclaimed the widow indignantly.

"For the good and substantial reason that I love some one else."

"You love some one else!"

"Yes."

"And pray, sir, who is the some one else?"

"Forgive me, Frau, for saying at the present moment I cannot answer that question. But I will do so before long—possibly in a few days." The widow looked at him with flashing eyes. Then after a pause she dismissed him imperiously and angrily, and with the by no means flattering remark—

"Let me tell you this, Joseph—you are a fool."

Of course she meant by this that he was a fool in her opinion for having refused a pretty servant lass who had a fortune of four thousand francs and the necessary household linen to begin housekeeping with, and five hundred francs which he himself could have had, for what? for, as the widow assumed, some wretched jade who in all probability hadn't two sous to rattle together. Whether the widow was right or not will be seen by and by.

CHAPTER IV.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

JOSEPH COURRETTE did not feel very elated as he passed out of Frau Schmidt's sanctum, for he was conscious that she was mightily offended, and he was doubtful whether he would be able to propitiate her for some time to come. The house, like most houses of the kind in Switzerland, was built with a veranda in front, part of it being covered with glass and screened with coloured blinds, to subdue the glare of the sunlight. From the veranda a little flight of steps, arched over with iron trellis-work that was completely hidden by roses and jessamine, gave access to the garden.

Joseph made his way to this veranda, intending to go through the garden to the steamboat pier and take the boat back to town. Bertha was sitting on the veranda doing some woolwork, and as he came out of the salon she jumped up, peered into the salon to see that no one was there, and then asked in a whisper—

"Where is my mother?"

"I left her upstairs in her bureau."

"What did she want you for?"

"She wanted to arrange a marriage for me."

"To arrange a marriage for you!"

"Yes."

"With whom!"

"With Anna Strubholtz."

"With Anna Strubholtz!"—and Bertha laughed, as it

were contemptuously, but suddenly some expression of anxiety came into her face as she asked, "How did you get out of it?"

"By candidly saying that I loved some one else."

"That was a dreadful confession, Joseph. What did she say to it?"

"She seemed very much amazed."

"Was she angry?"

"Yes, exceedingly angry."

Bertha appeared to be very reflective and thoughtful for some moments, and then she said—

"Joseph, it won't do to offend maman. You must be very careful."

"But what am I to do?" he asked with a sigh, and a perplexed look on his face.

"Be true to the one you love," she said sweetly.

"Ah, that I intend to be at all cost," he exclaimed.

"Nevertheless you must keep in with maman; it will never do to offend her."

"It is easy to say I must keep in with her, but how is it to be done? The Frau is unreasonable."

"All mothers are unreasonable—at least from their children's point of view," said Bertha, with a pretty laugh.

"You must find out a way to propitiate her. She is very fond of you, you know, and thinks a great deal of you, so it will never do to quarrel with her."

"Heaven knows I have no desire to quarrel with her," sighed Joseph, with great earnestness. "But if she insists on my doing that which I cannot do, then I am afraid there is no hope."

The sounds of some one approaching put an end to the conversation, and by a sudden impulse Joseph seized Bertha's hand, pressed it to his lips, and disappeared as Frau Schmidt came on to the veranda. This act of Joseph's had been quickly done, but not quick enough to escape the quick eyes of the Frau, who, clasping her hands together in amazement, exclaimed—

"Ber—tha—can—it be *possible* ? "

She laid great stress on the possible, as though she were inclined to doubt the evidence of her own senses.

Covered with confusion, her face scarlet, her eyes down-cast, Bertha stood in an attitude of detected guilt, and murmured—

"Is what possible, maman ? "

The good Frau's eyes flashed with the fire of indignation at this assumed ignorance and innocence, and she made reply angrily—

"What possible ! You know perfectly well, child, what I mean."

Bertha remained silent but trembling, and as no response was forthcoming, the widow demanded, with rising warmth—

"Tell me, girl, did I not see Joseph kiss your hand ? "

"You did," murmured Bertha, as she sank on to a seat, and burst into tears.

"And do you not feel ashamed of yourself," asked her mother with a scornful curl of her lip, "for having allowed a plebeian like Joseph, one of the canaille, to treat you in such a familiar manner ? " The Frau paused as if expecting an answer, but none was vouchsafed. She stood the very embodiment of injured pride and wounded vanity ; her body erect, her arms folded, her head thrown back, her lips curled, and her whole expression indicative of contempt. Then suddenly a new thought seemed to strike her, and with an imperious gesture, and a little stamp of her foot, she cried—"Look at me, child, and answer my question. Has there been any intriguing between you and Joseph Courrette ? "

Bertha did not answer, but, covering her face with her handkerchief, she sobbed.

Her mother became exasperated, and going to her she pulled the handkerchief forcibly away, and flung it across the veranda.

"Are you dumb with grief and silent with shame," she demanded, "that you cannot give me an answer and look me in the face?"

"Maman," moaned out poor Bertha at last, "you are treating me as if I were a criminal who had been guilty of some shameful deed."

"If you have been guilty of intriguing with that gutter youth then you *have* been guilty of a shameful deed," retorted her mother angrily, and forgetting how humble had been her own origin. "I proposed to marry him to Anna Strubholtz, and was prepared to give him the means of making a fair start in married life; but he has had the impertinence and presumption to refuse my offer, and within a quarter of an hour of that refusal I find him kissing your hand. Bertha, there is something wrong, and I'll get to the bottom of it by some means or another. And if I find you are deceiving me I'll turn you out of my house, child though you are of mine. You have a fortune, it is true, but your father in his will gave me the power of withholding that fortune from you until you are six-and-twenty if I think fit; and just as sure as you sit there I will do it, and turn you out if you are playing me false. Remember that on you rests the honour and dignity of our house, and I would never forgive you if you sully that honour and dignity in any way. Now, then, I ask you plainly, and I demand and will have an answer, has Joseph Courrette been making love to you?"

Bertha rose up with a great cry, and literally flung herself at her mother's feet, clasping her knees and looking up with a red, wet, piteous, appealing face, to the hard, stern one that frowned upon her. She had never seen her mother so angry before and she was frightened.

"Maman, don't be so angry," she moaned, "and I will tell you all. Joseph has made love to me."

"And have you given him any encouragement?"

"Yes."

"Ach Got, can such a thing be possible?" exclaimed the exasperated Frau, as shaking herself free and leaving her daughter on her knees, she paced excitedly up and down.

Attracted by Bertha's cry, her brother Fritz, who had been reading in one of the rooms, came on to the veranda to see what was the matter. As soon as he appeared his mother turned to him excitedly and said—

"Oh, Fritz, little did I think I should live to feel ashamed of my own daughter."

"What is it, what is it, maman?" asked Fritz, in some alarm.

"Bertha, upon whom we have set our hopes, confesses that Joseph Courrette has been making love to her, and that she has encouraged him."

Fritz was a dainty-looking young man, with a vast expanse of shirt-front and cuffs, and a display of jewellery that was quite imposing. He was of a pronounced Saxon type. Fair hair, blue eyes, waxen complexion, and a light, curling moustache. His somewhat insipid and characterless face darkened with an anger frown as his mother spoke, and turning to Bertha, he demanded authoritatively—

"To what length has this idiotic affair gone?"

Bertha rose from her crouching position, and sat down on a chair.

"It has been going on for some time," she answered, sobbingly.

"How long?" demanded Fritz.

"For nearly three years."

Fritz and his mother literally staggered at this announcement, and they looked at each other as though they could not believe what they heard. When the Frau had recovered from the shock, she asked—

"Has Courrette written to you at all?"

"Yes."

"Where are his letters?"

"I have destroyed them."

"Are you sure?" put in the brother.

Bertha looked at him with flashing indignation. She did not like to be doubted, especially by her brother. But she did not answer him. Her looks were sufficient, and he felt a little ashamed of himself.

"And I suppose," pursued the Frau, "that you have been in the habit of answering his letters."

"Yes, I have," Bertha replied, in a low tone.

"And pray tell me, during the time that you have been carrying on this shameless clandestine correspondence what have you been looking forward to? What has been your idea as to the ultimate issue?" asked her mother, peremptorily.

"My idea has been that I should become his wife."

The Frau threw up her arms, and uttering a cry of disgust dropped into a chair, while Fritz broke into a scornful and mocking laugh.

"Oh, Fritz," moaned his mother, "get me my scent-bottle, for I am sure I shall faint. And you will find my fan on my dressing-table; please bring it."

Fritz, like a dutiful son, hurried off to execute the commission. Then the widow turned to her weeping daughter, and said—

"The best thing you can do, child, is to go to your room. Something will have to be done, for, Got in Himmel, only think of the disgrace if this scandal should leak out. Why, I should never hold up my head again in Zurich."

Bertha, who was suffering great distress of mind, was only too glad to get away, and obeying her mother's instructions she went to her room. Her girlish dream had ended. For three years she had carried on a correspondence with Joseph, and so well had they kept their secret that it had never ~~one~~ been suspected. She believed, and possibly her belief was well founded, that she truly and devotedly loved Joseph. But her secret was not proof against the first signs of detection, and she had felt herself utterly incapable of dis-

sembling before her mother. She was impelled to confess the truth, but having confessed it, she felt very, very unhappy.

In a few minutes Fritz returned to the veranda with the scent-bottle and the fan, and when the widow had sniffed at the one and freely used the other, she said—

"Well, Fritz, this is a pretty state of affairs. Only to think of the awful deception of Courrette! After the way he has been treated, after all the kindness I have shown him, and yet he has been able to play this double part."

"I'll break his neck," said Fritz, drawing his manly figure up, and looking very tragic.

"No, you won't," said his mother. "You won't do anything to bring scandal upon us. I for one suffer enough as it is in knowing that my daughter, whom I have striven so hard to make a lady of, has deceived me, and dared for a single instant to allow such a low-bred peasant as Joseph Courrette to talk love to her. Oh, it's dreadful; it is, indeed, dreadful."

"Well, what's to be done, maman?" asked Fritz.

"Really I scarcely know at present," responded his mother thoughtfully. "I cannot believe for a single moment that Bertha has had any serious intentions. It has been a silly, childish flirtation; but, nevertheless, it is terrible to contemplate that she should so far have forgotten her high station and the dignity of her social position as to stoop so low."

"You may depend upon it, maman," said Fritz with an air of gravity, "that though she may have attached no importance to what you are pleased to term a childish flirtation, Courrette, the artful scoundrel, has been laying his plans well, and you have nipped them just in time; otherwise, you may be sure he would have persuaded her to have eloped with him, and a nice plum he would have got with her fortune. In fact, it's been her fortune he's been aiming at."

"Oh, Fritz, it's dreadful," sighed the distressed widow, as she vigorously sniffed at her scent-bottle. "Only imagine such a man being allied to our family."

Fritz turned up his nose in lofty scorn, and puffed out his breath as though the bare idea of such a thing was nauseating.

"Something must be done, you know, maman," he remarked.

"Yes, something shall be done. Bertha shall be sent to her uncle in Fribourg, and as for Joseph, you had better let me deal with him," said the Frau. "I will see him here to-morrow, and I warrant that I will put an end to this ridiculous and disgraceful affair."

CHAPTER V.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

FRAU SCHMIDT was possessed of considerable influence over her daughter, as she was, in fact, over each of her children. She was a strong-minded and practical woman, in spite of that weakness for social distinction. Her business aptitude was really remarkable for a woman, and she had very little of the sentimental or romantic vein in her composition.

If Bertha had been older and more experienced, the probabilities are that she would have elected to go her own way, in spite of her mother's wishes. But although she had reached an age when thousands of girls are women, and even wives and mothers, Bertha was still a schoolgirl, with a schoolgirl's ideas and amenability to discipline. This will explain how it was that, when taxed with her indiscretion—if such it was—she so readily disclosed her secret and confessed her fault.

Her grief at the position she suddenly found herself in was very severe, for her love passages with Joseph had been a delightful dream. He had the faculty of writing letters, and his letters to her were always sweet reading, and when she destroyed them, which she did in order to prevent them by any possible chance from falling into the hands of some one who would betray her, it was with a sigh of deep regret, for she would have liked to have kept those precious documents, and have re-read their contents over and over again.

As will be readily understood, the lovers had not much chance of telling their vows to each other by word of mouth, for Joseph only saw Bertha when she was at home, and then they recognized the necessity of exercising the very greatest caution.

Their love-making had begun three years before this period. Frau Schmidt was away from home at the time, and Joseph was frequently at the house. Bertha was young and impressionable. Joseph was good-looking, and far from commonplace. So they fell in love with each other, and for three years they had kept their secret from every one. Not even to his parents had Joseph breathed it. Had it not been for the widow's scheme in regard to her favourite servant, Anna Strubholtz, it is more than likely that a secret marriage between Joseph and Bertha would have resulted. As it was now, an effectual barrier was placed between them. The more Frau Schmidt dwelt upon the subject, the more did her pride suffer. It seemed to her almost an unpardonable sin that *her* daughter should have condescended to allow a common mechanic of peasant origin to make love to her. She who had aimed as high as a duke, and would not have hesitated even to have thought of a king if there had been the remotest chance of getting one to marry her child, felt that her *amour propre* had been outraged by this ignoble and bemeaning affair. For nearly two hours she fretted herself about it. Then she began to make resolutions, and proceeded at once to her daughter's room.

Poor Bertha's eyes were still wet, her face flushed, and her hair straggling. There was no mistake about her sorrow and distress, and as Frau Schmidt seated herself in a stately sort of way, she said—

"I am very glad to see, Bertha, that you are at least contrite. Your disgraceful conduct and your deceit may well weigh heavily upon you, and I cannot wonder that they cause you pangs of anguish. Your tears, therefore, are a good sign, for they show that you are not hardened."

It will be admitted that the Frau was very severe, unnecessarily so, but then she acted according to her lights, and it did seem to her that her daughter's offence was a very heinous one indeed.

Bertha was naturally moved to a fresh outburst of tears, and could make no reply. Her mother remained silent for some minutes, and then she continued—

"Well, now, I think you have cried enough. However many tears you may shed they won't undo the mischief. Our task is to minimise it as much as possible, and do everything that it's possible to do to prevent the scandal leaking out; for if it does I think I shall never get over the disgrace. It will kill me, I am sure of it. It's a wonder that your poor father's bones do not turn in his grave, seeing how you have outraged the family honour."

The Frau could not resist this little bit of hypocrisy, although she knew full well that her husband never shared her vanity, and had none of her pride, and the chances are that had he been alive and had known of this he would have said—"Oh, well, let the poor girl please herself—let her have the man of her choice." But the Frau looked upon his want of pride as a weakness that entirely marred what would otherwise have been a most excellent man.

Overcome by her grief and wounded by her mother's severity, poor Bertha ejaculated during one of the pauses—

"I declare, I wish I was dead, that I do."

"Bertha!" cried her mother, upraising her hands in pious horror. "How—dare—you—give—expression—to—such—an—atrocious—sentiment!" She paused between each word in order to add more effect and weight to her utterances. "I gave you credit for having more of my spirit and pride in you."

"And, pray, what is the use of pride if one is to know no happiness?" asked Bertha, growing bolder, but she instantly shrank up again, so to speak, as her mother frowned upon her, and in accents of pitiless severity, said—

"You are a silly and disgraceful child, and unless you want me to cast you out of my heart altogether you will be more guarded in your language."

Bertha felt cowed and subdued, and any little resolution she might have had oozed away before her mother's determined aspect.

"Now, I want you to write a letter to Courrette. Sit down there and I'll dictate to you what you are to say," pursued the Frau, in such a peremptory tone that it left no room for doubt that she was very much in earnest, and would not hear of any excuse.

Bertha did at first show some reluctance, but her mother's looks frightened her again, and she obeyed the command. The result was the following letter :

"I have awakened to a sense of my folly during the last three years, and blush now to think that I have been guilty of such disgraceful conduct as to carry on a secret correspondence with you. I think I must have been mad, but I am so no longer. If you have ever for one single moment seriously thought it possible that I could marry you, I must tell you now in language that will permit of no misinterpretation that under no circumstances could I become your wife. In fact, reflection serves to convince me that your presumption in even daring to write to me is unpardonable. The social difference between us is so great that the barrier separating us can never be broken down. Your path lies in an entirely opposite direction to mine, and we must not meet again except it be by accident, and even then you must not forget that you are simply a workman in the employment of my family."

The act of writing this letter was the most painful thing that Bertha had ever done in the whole course of her life. Once or twice she had come within an ace of revolting against her mother's commands, but her courage failed her, and she slavishly put on to paper sentiments that belied the true feelings of her heart. As she sealed the letter up, however, and handed it to her mother, she mentally resolved

to take means to send another note to Joseph, in which she would tell him that the first had been written under coercion, and did not express her true feelings—that, as a matter of fact, she loved him sincerely, and he was to live in hopes of possessing her.

The Frau felt more satisfied now that she had got this letter in her possession, and she said—

“This is one step towards separation at any rate. And now I intend to send you to-morrow by the first train to Fribourg to your Uncle Peter. Fritz will accompany you, and will inform your uncle why you have been sent. He will be very much shocked, I know, but he may be trusted to keep the matter secret. In a few days, when you come to reflect on your conduct, you will be overwhelmed with shame, and will acknowledge, or I am very much mistaken, that I have taken a wise course.”

The indignant lady felt that she could hardly add anything more weighty to what she had already said, and so, telling her daughter that she was to dress herself for *déjeuner*, and that afterwards the carriage would be ordered for a drive, she left her. Then poor Bertha, unable to control her feelings, gave vent to them in bitter crying. She felt that her mother had been very hard, very severe, and even cruel to her. But above all she was tortured by that letter she had been forced into writing. And so strongly indignant was she about this that in the course of half-an-hour a fit of desperation seized her, and she penned a fresh letter to Joseph, telling him to take no notice of the letter he would receive through her mother ; but that he was to be cautious, silent, and hopeful, for that she still loved him, and love would triumph in the end.

Having thus relieved her mind to some extent, she carefully secreted the letter until she could get an opportunity to post it to Joseph's private address, and then she attired herself for *déjeuner*.

In the meantime Frau Schmidt had taken counsel with

her son—not that she considered she needed counsel, for she had a very pronounced opinion as to her own wisdom. Still she discussed the matter with Fritz, and would have done so with Peter, but it so happened that Peter was making a tour with some companions. He was going down the Rhine, and was to spend a fortnight or so in Cologne. The two brothers never went away together, as they could not both be spared at one time from the business, and so Peter generally took his holidays first, and Fritz his later on in the season.

Being Sunday morning several visitors dropped in to luncheon, for Sunday is a favourite day for visiting in Switzerland.

Having arrayed herself in an exquisite toilet, Bertha appeared at the table, and the young men present silently sighed their hearts out as they gazed on her. But though these young men were quite equal, and even superior in social position to the Schmidts, the ambitious widow would not have dreamed of uniting her daughter to one of them.

The *déjeuner* was a lively affair. Bertha tried to feel light-hearted, and entered into the jokes with spirit, although her spirits were forced. The numerous dishes which constitute a Swiss breakfast having been duly disposed of, the gentlemen retired to the veranda to partake of black coffee and smoke their cigarettes. In a few minutes the ladies joined them, and in the course of half-an-hour the Frau, her daughter, and a lady friend went for their drive, while the gentlemen adjourned to the billiard-room to while away an hour or two at billiards.

The Frau's carriage was a very pompous affair, and was drawn by two superb horses arrayed in silver-mounted harness, and driven by a sedate white-haired coachman in gorgeous livery. As the wealthy widow leaned back on the luxurious cushions, and saw the envious eyes that were directed at her turn-out, as the noble horses spanked along, she felt supremely satisfied with herself, and considered that she was exceedingly clever at having discovered her daughter's little intrigue, and so effectually put an end to it.

CHAPTER VI.

BENT BUT NOT BROKEN.

DURING that memorable Sunday, Bertha found no opportunity of posting her letter to Joseph, and she left for Fribourg in company with Fritz by an early train on Monday morning. But she resolved that she would post it as soon after she reached her destination as possible. Uncle Peter Gottschalk, to whom she was going, was her mother's brother. He had originally been an hotel *propriétaire*, and having made money he, having much of his sister's vanity, considered he was destined for a very much higher position than the keeper of an hotel, and so commenced business as a banker in Fribourg, where, being a small place, a *banquier* was looked upon as a very big personage indeed. It is doubtful whether Uncle Peter was quite as successful in his banking business as he was as an hotel-keeper, but then only think of the difference socially. A banker and an hotel proprietor ought not to be mentioned in the same breath. At least Uncle Peter thought so. He had a numerous family, and they had been brought up with very rigid notions of gentility, and had the most exalted opinion of their rich relations in Zurich.

Having seen her daughter safely away in charge of Fritz, the widow rubbed her hands in a sort of self-congratulatory style, and waited for the further development of the little drama.

She had ordered the coachman who had driven the brother and sister to the railway station to call at the

foundry on his return, and bring Joseph back. As may be imagined, Courrette was very much surprised when he got the message, and when he saw the highly-varnished carriage with its obtrusive coat-of-arms, he hesitated about entering it in his working clothes. But the coachman said his orders were peremptory, and Joseph could get up on the box. Joseph thought to himself, however, if I am going to ride at all I'll ride inside, and he did. And as he experienced the luxurious ease of the splendid carriage, delicately balanced on its springs, which imparted a delightful dreamy motion to the occupant of the vehicle, he began to have envious longings, and he actually fell to planning the sort of carriage he would have, and the style of house when Bertha was his wife ; for at that moment he felt quite sure she would be his wife, although he knew perfectly well that innumerable difficulties were in the way. But then what difficulties can one not overcome when an heiress is to be won ?

In sending for Joseph Courrette Frau Schmidt had a double object in view. The first was to let him know that she had discovered his "carryings on" with Bertha ; and the second was to again point out to him the advantages of his marrying Anna Strubholtz. Once married, she thought, and all danger will be passed ; and, showing how little she knew of Joseph's real character, she quite believed that she would so influence and persuade him that he would yield to her, and make Anna his wife.

When Joseph arrived at the Beau Séjour he was told that he was to go to the salon, where the Frau would come to him. Of course he didn't dream for an instant what she really wanted him for, but he thought it was no doubt in connection with the marriage she had proposed to him, so he smiled to himself as he said—

"The good Frau will have her trouble for nothing. She doesn't know Joseph Courrette yet."

That ride in the carriage had, as it were, whetted his appetite for more, and as he gazed round the magnificently

furnished room, with its real fur rugs, its gilded furniture, costly mirrors, articles of vertu, and valuable pictures, he began to ask himself why he, a clever workman, as it was admitted and as he knew he was, should by the toil of his hands and the sweat of his brow help to keep up all this magnificence, while he himself had to be content with humble fare and squalid lodgings?

Of course this argument was an illogical and stupid one. It was, in fact, the text of all Socialism, which is born of envy and laziness. The rich are hated by the lower orders for no other reason than that they are rich, and those who advocate the equal distribution of wealth utterly ignore the incontrovertible fact that if it were distributed to-day in less than a year afterwards it would have gravitated to certain centres again, and have fallen into the hands of the comparative few. This is a universal law that all Socialists fail to recognize.

If Joseph, who was a clever young man, and a well-educated man for one in his position, had chosen to study Switzerland itself he might have learnt a lasting lesson. For there, every man is nominally a landowner; but it would be difficult to find a thousand acres in all the country that are free of mortgage, while the peasantry are steeped to the lips in poverty, and their lives are a ceaseless round of toil, misery, unutterable squalidness, and abject meanness. The rich are few, the poor are many; the peasant children are born in ignorance, and die in ignorance of any of the world's comforts. And from the time that they can toddle to the time when weary and heart-sick they are ready for their graves, their lives are a constant struggle against bitter poverty. Perhaps Joseph was not aware of this; or, if he was, he did not care to remember it. Nor did he remember that ability and steady honest toil invariably bring their reward, often in the shape of riches, but nearly always in contentment and comfort. He was clever, and in a little while would be able to earn large wages—if not in his own

country, anywhere else he liked to go to, for the world is large, and there are markets innumerable for skill and talent. But Joseph wanted wealth at once, as many hundreds of thousands before him have wanted it. And the wealth he wanted, so he thought, would come to him if he could only win Bertha.

It must not be inferred from this that he thought only of Bertha's thousands. He loved her truly, and there is little doubt that if, by some sudden reverse of fortune, she had found herself penniless, and had asked him to have her, he would not have hesitated for a single instant. In this respect he was not mercenary. However much he might desire to possess her fortune, he loved her more than he loved money. His cogitations were at last interrupted by the entrance of Frau Schmidt. He rose to greet her, as was his wont, and was at once struck by her frigidity. She generally received him with patronizing familiarity, but now she was stately and reserved in her bearing.

"I dare say you wonder why I have sent for you," she began in a severe tone, "but if you read that it will explain."

As she spoke she handed him Bertha's letter; and as he opened it with trembling hand, she fixed her eyes upon him.

A hurried scanning of the lines enabled him at once to grasp the situation, and then a coldness seemed to pass through his veins, and his heart became heavy as lead.

Thus ended his dreams. Thus were all his hopes shattered.

With white face he turned to the Frau, but he spoke no word.

"You see, my good man," she began, with a haughty smile of disdain, and a chuckle of triumph, "your baseness has been discovered, and my child, having come to her senses, treats you with proper contempt. Your fate now is in your own hands. If you have ever been insane enough to imagine for one single moment that you could marry Bertha, your eyes will now be surely opened to your egregious folly. My daughter has been taken away beyond

your sinister influence, and only on certain conditions will you be allowed to remain in our employ. It is necessary that you should learn, and learn quickly, too, what your proper level is. You have dared to soar out of your sphere, and you have come down with a thud. The shock possibly will bring you to your senses. Now I have not the slightest desire to be harsh to you in any way, although I consider your disgraceful and deceitful conduct deserves exemplary punishment. But there is only one condition upon which I will consent to forgive you, and that is that you at once engage yourself to Anna Strubholtz, and marry her within three months.”¹

Joseph found tongue at last. He had been dumb up to now. A mist had come over his eyes ; a sense of sickening despair had seized him. But her words brought him to his senses. He drew himself up proudly. He looked at her scornfully. He spoke decisively.

“Frau Schmidt,” he said, “you have mistaken me for a fool, thereby showing that you are not capable of reading character.”

The widow winced at this. It cut her, but she made no remark. “Let me tell you,” he went on, “that if you were to give Anna Strubholtz a *dot* of two hundred thousand francs I wouldn’t marry her.” The widow opened her eyes and mouth in amazement, but she still remained silent. “If you think me incapable of pure passion,” he continued, “then you are duller than I take you to be.”

“This is audacity, Joseph,” the widow exclaimed, unable to control herself longer.

“Hear me out,” he said firmly ; “I haven’t quite finished. I love your daughter. I worship her. If in looking to her I have looked to the stars, I am not the only humble man

¹ It is customary in Switzerland, as in most Continental countries, for a young man and woman to be formally engaged, and this engagement is publicly announced. It is not often that such an engagement is broken or cancelled.—*The Author*,

who has looked above him." The widow felt as if she was going to faint, for to hear this man confess to worshipping her daughter was unbearable. But the next instant an imperceptible smile came to her lips as he said—"This letter, however, that I hold in my hand proves to me that your daughter does not return my love. Or, at any rate, if she does, your influence will no doubt prevent her giving practical proof of it. So be it. My dream ends. Perhaps it doesn't occur to you that it is a serious matter to break a man's heart. You may even look upon it as rather a clever thing to do."

He paused, for his emotion had got the better of him, and the Frau hastened to say—

"Don't talk such nonsense. A broken heart, forsooth! A young man like you ought to be ashamed of yourself for giving expression to such rubbish. You must know perfectly well that for you to think of marrying my daughter is preposterous—outrageous. A downright insult to me and mine, in fact."

"Am I not honest?" he asked, angrily.

"I say nothing against your honesty," she replied, with some confusion.

"Do you forget, then," he went on, "that your father was a blacksmith, and that your husband was of peasant origin, as I am?"

Frau Schmidt uttered a little scream, as he thus stabbed her with his words. And her white face and trembling lips showed how he had probed her. She could have forgiven him for making love to her daughter, but she could not forgive him for reminding her of her own humble origin. She whose riches were to be counted by millions of francs; she who owned that splendid house and the magnificent carriage with its pompous coat-of-arms, to be told that she was a blacksmith's daughter, and that her husband was a peasant, was more than flesh and blood could stand. It was true she knew, but to be told of it, and by *him*, was, in her sight, a crime of the first magnitude.

"You villain," she exclaimed, passionately, "I brought you here thinking to make peace with you and to give you a chance of settling comfortably in life. But you will go your own way now. I have done with you. I wash my hands of you entirely."

"Do not alarm yourself, Frau," he replied, with equal scorn. "I desire not your patronage nor your mock sympathy. You have wealth, it is true, but you were not born to wealth, and some day your pride may have a fall. Of one thing you may rest assured, if I live you shall hear of me. I do not intend to hide my light under a bushel. I am not disposed to toil and moil all my days for such as you. You have shown me some kindness in the past, and for that I thank you, and having done that I have discharged my debt. I owe you nothing else."

"You are an ingrate, a vagabond," she gasped, burning with indignation.

"I am neither the one nor the other," he answered, proudly. "But further discussion is useless. As a parting word, let me give you my solemn assurance that if I cannot marry your daughter the woman is not born whom I will marry. I will not say farewell but *au revoir*, for I have no doubt we shall meet again." He turned on his heel and marched out, leaving the widow dumbfounded with insulted pride, and amazement at his boldness. She was conscious that she had met her match and more than a match. She had thought to treat him as a boy, but had found him to be a resolute, proud, and unbending man. Moreover she felt that he was dangerous, and that her daughter would have to be watched and guarded very closely. "Fortunately I have the means," she thought to herself, "and I will send her to the farthest ends of the earth rather than she shall fall into the toils of this rascal."

When she had somewhat recovered from her surprise she rang the bell for her maid, and sank down perfectly overcome on to a sofa ; for she had received a shock that she had

never for a single instant contemplated. She had to confess to herself that she *had* made a mistake in Joseph, and she was quite startled by his reckless bearing. But what hurt her more than anything else was his reference to her humble origin. Nothing could have galled or stung her so much as that, and she determined to be revenged, though how she did not exactly know.

CHAPTER VII.

OUT INTO THE WORLD.

WHEN Joseph left Beau Séjour after that stormy interview with Frau Schmidt, he was an utterly changed man. As long as it seemed within the bounds of probability that he might marry Bertha he was content to plod on, to wait patiently, and for the time being to live on hope. But now that the probability had passed away a great spirit of unrest sprang up within him. He would no more be content with his position. He was conscious of his own abilities, and these, coupled with his ambition, made him feel that he was destined for something higher than to grovel in the gutter all his days. So long as this feeling had been properly controlled, and if he had received good guidance, there is no telling to what honourable position he might have attained. As it was now, a feeling of devilish recklessness seized upon him, and he cursed Fate, cursed his position and his poverty, and became impious. This very condition sprang from the love he bore Bertha, for the anguish of disappointment at losing her was so great that it begot a species of madness which caused him to take a perverted view of life and its obligations. "Why shouldn't I be as rich as other people?" he asked himself. This is a question ever uppermost in the minds of those who have to struggle to live. And there is no doubt that to the attempt to find an answer to it is attributable all the social upheavings that are going on throughout the world.

Joseph did not return straight to the foundry at Zurich, but made his way to a café, where, thoroughly miserable and utterly downcast, he consumed absinthe until his brain was all muddled and on fire. Then he went back to the works and demanded the wages due to him, and on the manager refusing to comply with the extraordinary demand, he became very violent and aggressive. This was tolerated for a little while, as it was the first time in all the years he had been there that he had ever exhibited any such spirit. He bore, in fact, the reputation of being the steadiest and one of the best workmen in the place; and from the patronage bestowed upon him by the Frau Schmidt, he occupied the position of an exceptionally privileged employé.

He was now spoken quietly to, and advised to go home, but in his present frame of mind the kindness was thrown away, and the advice fell on barren soil. He would listen to no reason, and at last became so violent and threatening that it was necessary to call in a *garde de paix*, and have him removed. Then he returned to the café and consumed more absinthe; and having got into a quarrel with another of the customers of the café, he was handed over to a *gendarme*, and by him conveyed to the jail, where he was locked up for the night.

When he came to his senses in the morning and realized his position, he had to bear the sense of bitter disgrace and humiliation, in addition to his disappointment, and he felt as if he would never again hold up his head.

As soon as he was released from *durance vile*, he went to his home, and found his parents in a state of great distress and agitation, for, finding that he did not return home on the previous day at the usual time, his father had gone to the foundry, and learnt what had taken place.

"I have been foolish," Joseph said to his mother and father, "but you must forgive me. It is the first time in my life that ever I have made a beast of myself, and a man's first fault of the kind may be regarded with leniency. I do

not wish you to reproach me, nor even to talk to me about it. I have had a keen disappointment, a disappointment that has crushed me. Perhaps soon I will tell you what it is. Now I want to be quiet, and am going to bed."

Mr. and Mrs. Courrette were not likely to reproach their son, and certainly were disposed to look upon his offence as a very venial one. They were worthy people, and very highly respected. Their home, if humble, was infinitely superior to many of the same class, and everything they could do to add to the comfort and happiness of their son they did. It was generally supposed that they were possessed of some means apart from what they earned, for Mrs. Courrette went out to do needlework at people's houses, being what is known as a *lingère*, and her husband cultivated his plot of ground, the produce yielding him a fair profit.

Joseph retired to his room, having partaken of a slight breakfast, and his mother went out to fulfil an engagement for the day. Joseph threw himself on his bed and slept for a few hours, and when he awoke he was physically refreshed, though more than ever depressed. He partook of dinner with his father, who plied him with questions as to the cause of his grief, but Joseph would enter into no explanations, and was disposed to be sullen and silent, so that his father at last wisely refrained from further conversation on the subject, thinking that the moody fit would soon pass off, and his son would be all right again. But even his father did not know Joseph's character thoroughly. The lad was possessed of a will and determination that he had never before displayed, and in addition he was peculiarly sensitive. The way he had been treated by Frau Schmidt had stung him to the quick, for he considered himself quite good enough to be the husband of Bertha. And then the humiliation he suffered from his imprisonment and disgrace, and the thought that she would come to know of it, almost drove him wild. He felt that he could never hold up his head again in Zurich; but even if that were not so how could he remain there,

knowing that he was separated for ever from the only woman he had ever loved, or was ever likely to love, as it seemed to him in his then frame of mind?

"I have lost Bertha," he thought, "and now I care not what I do or what becomes of me. I will go away, for to stop here is impossible."

Having come to this determination, he proceeded to pack some of his things into a small portmanteau. He had a few hundred francs that he had saved, so that his immediate needs would be provided for.

His preparations completed, he wrote the following letter to his parents:

"MY DEAR MOTHER AND FATHER,—A blow has fallen upon me, the weight and severity of which no one but myself can realize. For more than three years I have passionately loved Bertha Schmidt, and have dared to dream and hope that the day would come when I might make her my wife. No doubt the outside world would say that I have been guilty of presumption, for I know that it is considered an act of presumption for a workman to aspire to the hand of an heiress, especially when the heiress happens to be the daughter of the workman's employer. But still there are cases in which the workman may be worthy even of an heiress. In my case, however, the dream is over. I have been awakened with a very rude shock indeed. Up to yesterday morning I had every reason to believe that my love was returned. Between me and Fräulein Schmidt some hundreds of letters have passed, and hers to me have always breathed the warmest devotion. We have kept our secret well, so well that no one has even suspected it. How it has leaked out at last I know not. I was aware that Frau Schmidt was desirous that her daughter should make a high marriage, but I could never bring myself to believe that the mere considerations of pride would be allowed to separate two people who devotedly loved each other. Therefore I

have had no hesitation in carrying on a correspondence with Fräulein Bertha, and in urging her on every conceivable occasion to become my wife.

"Of course I am aware of my own humble origin, and that the only fortune I possess is the labour of my hands. But then is it not notorious that Frau Schmidt's origin was very humble, while that of her husband was still more so? Fortune smiled upon them, and they made money, but that can never alter the fact that they come from the common people, and therefore I consider myself in every way their equal. I have ambition, and given the chance I might have risen, for I have ever been willing to labour. But I have been treated by Frau Schmidt as if I were a dog, and the yearnings of my soul, the dream of my life, the hopes and aims of my existence, have been reckoned as nothing, and I have been shattered on the altar of the god Mammon. Had I been some titled nonentity, though I had possessed no more brains than an idiot, I should have been permitted no doubt to possess the hand of Frau Schmidt's daughter; but because I am only an honest workman I have been spurned with scorn. If this had been the act of the Frau only I should have thought nothing of it, and would have persevered with my suit. But unhappily Bertha herself has fallen under her mother's influence, and has written me a letter which leaves me no hope.

"So be it. I must accept my fate, I suppose, but I cannot do it with indifference or unconcern. It is no exaggeration for me to say that the current of my life is changed, and may drift me into stormy waters. But what does that matter! To live on here in the humdrum way as a spurned toiler is for me impossible. Rather than submit to such serfdom I would drown myself in the lake. I am going out into the world. What to do I know not. I will no longer sit in the gutter, but will aim at the cushions and gilt of luxury. Why should I not? Am I not as good as many thousands who roll along in their carriages, and on whom

the world fawns ! I intend to go abroad, where I know not, nor do I care. The world is large, and I will roam through it a soldier of Fortune.

"This, then, is my resolve, and nothing can turn me from it. I dare not trust myself to say good-bye to you. The trial would be too great. I pray you think me not ungrateful, undutiful, or unfilial. I act according to my lights. I may be wrong, but at least I am sincere. To you, dear mother and father, I owe a debt I can never pay. You have striven to make my life bright and happy. But now the great unrest which is prompting me would no longer permit me to remain patient while week in and week out I toiled and moiled as a white slave—and for what ? A pittance that would only serve to keep body and soul together.

"If the step I now take causes you anguish, I crave your forgiveness. I feel that I must go away or I shall become mad. Besides, how could I longer remain in Schmidt and Sons' employ, since I have been cast out and rejected as the lover of the daughter of the house ?

"Do not fret for me or be uneasy. I shall return some day, and I will write to you whenever opportunity occurs. And rest assured, whenever I feel I want your advice and assistance I will apply to you.

"And now, adieu. Ever think of me as one who cherishes the warmest affection for the parents who have so tenderly watched over him.—Your loving son,
JOSEPH."

The writing of this letter caused him many a keen pang, and once or twice he was on the point of tearing the paper into shreds and going back to his work. But this feeling was only momentary, for his pride had been too sorely wounded, and his imprisonment had cut him to the soul. He was convinced that the high reputation he had borne in the foundry would be sullied. Besides, he could not suffer himself to live near the woman who had rejected him because he was poor and humble. Some men might have done so,

but he could not. His proud spirit chafed and fretted, and excitement in some form or other was now a necessity.

He joined his father and mother at the humble family supper, but he was very dull and silent, and they thought it wise not to annoy him with questions then. They remembered afterwards that when he bade them good-night previous to retiring to his room he displayed unusual warmth and affection, but they never dreamed that he was contemplating leaving them.

He lay down on his bed until he heard the clocks in the town toll midnight. Then he rose and collected his few things, stowing his money carefully away in his breast-pocket. Placing the letter he had written on the table in his room, he stole carefully along the passage, and, cautiously unbarring the door passed out.

The sky was filled with dark clouds, through which the moon occasionally shone, and there was a moan in the drear night wind that seemed to presage a coming storm. Joseph felt touched by the silence and sadness, and a little shudder shook him irresistibly, for the weirdness of the sky, with its broken patches of clouds, and fitful gleams of moonlight, together with the sullen moan of the wind, seemed to impress him with an idea that he was going out to a stormy destiny.

He paused for a few moments on the threshold of the house where he had passed his years, and he sighed heavily.

"I leave my happiness and my peace here," he muttered.

Then he hurried away through the silent, deserted streets, and set his face towards a little town some miles off, where he intended to catch an early morning train.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DISTINGUISHED GUEST.

MRS. COURRETTE was in the habit of taking her son some coffee and bread at half-past five in the morning, as he had to be at the foundry at six, and at nine o'clock he went to a café for his breakfast. On the morning of his departure she went to his room as usual, and was amazed and alarmed to find that his bed had not been slept in. Then glancing round the room she saw the letter addressed to her on the table. Instantly her heart sank down, and a great fear seized her. She read the letter hurriedly, and with strong and burning indignation against Frau Schmidt, who she considered had driven Joseph away. Next she hurried to her husband, who was already taking his coffee previous to going to work in his patch of ground. When he had made himself acquainted with the contents of the letter he looked at his wife in astonishment and sorrow.

"What is to be done?" he asked.

"What can we do?" she responded tearfully. "I believe the lad is right in the course he has taken. His proud spirit could not brook being snubbed by such a woman as the Frau Schmidt, who is not fit to clean his shoes. He will make his way in the world, depend upon it, and I don't see how we can resist his wishes. At any rate, we can do nothing but wait patiently until we hear from him, for he is certain to write. Joseph is not a fool, and will know how to take care of himself."

The good people were much cut up, but with proper philosophy they accepted the inevitable, both having faith in Joseph's abilities to make his way, and his power to take care of himself.

When Frau Schmidt heard of Joseph's departure she experienced a sense of joy, for she thought now that she had effectually got rid of all cause for fear, although her little plan for marrying Anna Strubholtz had miscarried, but she would simply have to look out for another young man for Anna.

"I have completely snuffed out Joseph," she thought, "and Anna won't break her heart."

On the following day Fritz returned, and reported that he had placed his sister in the safe keeping of Uncle Peter, who had been duly informed of all the circumstances, and had promised that the utmost vigilance should be exercised. In spite of this vigilance, however, it may here be stated that she managed to post her letter to Joseph, and it duly arrived at his mother's house. But he had departed then, and that letter, every word of which breathed love for him, which would have changed his destiny, was not to reach him until too late.

In a few days the Frau's mind had resumed its normal quietude, so to speak, and her match-making proclivities began to irresistibly assert themselves again, so that she commenced to seriously cast her eyes about for a fresh young man for Anna, who, by the way, was far more cut up by Joseph's departure than her mistress supposed, for the girl was deeply in love with him. But in about a fortnight's time the Frau was thrown into a state of great excitement, and everything else was cast into the shade by the receipt of a letter from her son Peter, who, as already stated, was making a tour in Germany.

Peter was a very striking contrast to his brother, who took after his mother, while Peter had more of his father in him. Although Peter had a proper sense of self-respect and

even some aristocratic notions, he was not blown up with the silly pride that characterized Fritz and his mother. Peter, in fact, was a far more manly young fellow, though not such an able business man as Fritz. He was fond of travelling, liked luxury, knew how to spend money, was without either affectation or ostentation, and had the happy knack of scraping acquaintances with people above him. His mother was perfectly cognizant of these traits, and she used to say to him whenever he was going away—"Now be sure you keep your eyes open, Peter," meaning thereby that he was to look out for a husband for his sister. He was passionately attached to Bertha, and while he would have liked to have seen her marry well, he would have interposed no objection to her marrying Joseph Courrette, if he had thought it would have made her happy. On the other hand Fritz and his mother would have sacrificed the girl's happiness for the sake of gratifying their vanity. The letter that Peter sent to his mother, and which threw her into such a flutter of excitement, was dated from the *Hotel du Géant*, at Coblenz. As every one knows, Coblenz is situated on the Rhine, just where the Blue Moselle joins it. It is accounted one of the strongest military stations in Germany, while the rocky fortress of Ehrenbreitstein, on the opposite bank, is designated "The Gibraltar of the Rhine." Peter had been spending several days at Coblenz, having come up the Rhine from Cologne.

"My dear maman," he wrote, "I have been having a delightful time in this dear old place, and enjoying myself immensely. But I have another item of news which I am sure will please you. Two or three nights ago I was playing billiards, and, as you know, I am accounted a very fair player. Several military officers were present, and one of them challenged me to a game. Of course, I accepted the challenge, and he and I became very friendly. On the following evening we met again, and drank coffee and smoked together. I then learned that he was Count von Arenberg, and an

officer of one of the crack regiments stationed here in garrison. When he heard that I came from Zurich he seemed very pleased, and informed me that a good many years ago he had lived in Zurich with an old aunt, and that he had a great love for the place, and would much like to see it again. I need scarcely say that when I heard this I gave him an invitation to visit Beau Séjour, and, will you believe it, dear maman, he has accepted, and is to travel back with me, if I can prolong my stay here for about another eight days, as he can get furlough then for a month or six weeks. So at last you will have a real live Count as your guest. I sha'n't describe him to you, as I intend to keep you in suspense. He seems an excellent fellow, and I have got to like him. But do not build any castles in the air, mind you, for this Count may be, for aught you know, an old grey-headed man with a wife and large family."

As the Frau read this letter her breath was fairly taken away at the very idea of a Count coming to her house. It seemed almost too good to be true, and then she berated Peter in her own mind, and called him a silly, ridiculous boy for not entering into a full and detailed description of the Count's personal appearance. To keep her in suspense in such a way was downright cruelty.

As the letter had come after Fritz's departure for business, the first thing she did was to order the landau and drive at once to the works to impart the good news to Fritz, who was not a whit less delighted than she was, and equally disappointed that Peter had been so tantalizingly reticent about the Count. However, the matter of the approaching visit of this distinguished personage was very freely discussed, and it was mutually agreed that everything possible must be done to make the Count's stay a pleasant one, while a day or two before his arrival Fritz was to start off for Fribourg to bring his sister home.

This plan having been settled, the Frau drove away, and on her road back she made several calls on acquaintances,

and at each place she contrived, with the artfulness that she knew so well how to employ, to inform her friends that in the course of a few days her son Peter would be returning home with *his friend the Count von Arenberg*. She spoke with an affected indifference, as though she had been in the habit of receiving Counts and other noblemen all her days, but her heart beat rapidly the while, and her cheeks flushed with pride as she noticed the look of envious surprise with which her announcement was greeted. When she had finished her visits she went to her upholsterer, and gave him instructions to come on the morrow, and specially fit up a bedroom at Beau Séjour for "my son's friend, the Count von Arenberg." She made a great mouthful of *her son's friend, the Count von Arenberg*. It was not often that she was able to give expression to her feelings with so much gusto and exquisitely keen relish, and she was not the woman to miss this opportunity. Her greatest ambition at that moment was that it might become a subject of common conversation in the town that the Count von Arenberg was coming to visit the Schmidts. She would have liked to have seen it announced in the newspapers, and to have had it placarded on the walls. In fact, it is not improbable that she would have considered it nothing more than her due if all the business of the place had been stopped in order that people might give undivided attention to the important event that her son's friend, the Count von Arenberg, was coming to Beau Séjour.

Poor woman! In her silly vanity she forgot that the world was far too busy to notice her and her small affairs.

In the belief, however, that she had deeply impressed the people she had called upon with a sense of her own importance, she drove home in a very happy state of mind, and she immediately beat up her household, and made it known that the Count was to be her guest. Then a hundred orders were issued. There was that to be done there, and this to be done somewhere else. The best curtains were to be put up.

Everything was to be scoured, cleaned, and polished ; and the real silver, which was only used on state occasions, was to be taken from its receptacle, and laid out in imposing array.

For the next few days the good widow was in a high fever of excitement. Amongst the family acquaintances the news had spread, and she had to receive numerous callers, nearly all of whom were anxious to be invited during the Count's stay. Of course the Frau rose in importance in her own estimation, and she said, and iterated and re-iterated it, that until she knew if her son's friend, Count von Arenberg, wished that his visit should be kept private or not, she could make no definite arrangements ; but she contemplated, if agreeable to her son's friend, the Count von Arenberg, giving a ball during his visit.

As the day drew near for Peter's return, Fritz was despatched to Fribourg to escort his sister back. Poor Bertha was very glad indeed to return home, for her stay at Fribourg had been rendered irksome and disagreeable by the system of espionage she knew was being exercised over her, and by the lectures that were almost hourly delivered to her by her aunt and uncle on the folly and sin of "marrying beneath one." Under these circumstances she hailed her brother's coming with delight, and left her uncle's house without a pang of regret. Moreover, she secretly hoped that when she got back she might be able to see Joseph Courrette or get some communication from him, for she was sure that after he had read her letter he would not rest until he had sent her a reply.

When she reached home her mother gave her the news with all the gravity and solemnity of a state announcement, but not a word did she utter about Joseph. Bertha tried to look pleased, and to some extent succeeded, but she was far from feeling so. She knew her mother's aims and desires ; and she knew that if circumstances permitted she was to be offered up as a sacrifice to her mother's vanity, and she there

and then mentally resolved that if any attempt was made to coerce her into a marriage that was distasteful to her, she would revolt at all hazards, and take Joseph, come what might. The worst that her mother could do would be to keep her out of her fortune for a few years. "And that won't be a very serious thing," she thought to herself, "for Joseph can earn sufficient to maintain us both comfortably." This perhaps was a little romantic, but she was not without spirit, and it is highly probable that she would have given her thoughts practical shape; but Fritz, who had a great notion of his own wisdom and tact, told her the story, with embellishments of his own, how Joseph had disgraced himself at the works, how he had been imprisoned for the night, and had disappeared from the town. The good brother related this story with peculiar zest, for he believed that nothing could serve so effectually to wean his sister from her hankering after her plebeian lover. But his words were thorns to her, and caused her keen anguish, for she felt sure that Joseph had been driven to desperation by the letter which she had written to her mother's dictation. But after a little reflection she consoled herself by thinking that the second letter, the one she had posted in Fribourg, would console him, and that he would most certainly take some means of communicating with her.

At length the eventful day arrived, and Peter and his friend, the Count von Arenberg, were to be in Zurich by the train due at eight o'clock in the evening. All day long the servants had been putting the finishing touches to the arrangements of Beau Séjour. The special bedroom prepared for the Count's use was a marvel in pink and gold. The dinner table had been laid since three o'clock, and was a perfect scene of beauty, with its glittering crystal, its spotless linen, its magnificent silver and display of flowers and exotic plants. The widow had invited no one on this particular day, as she was determined that her own family should have the Count all to themselves, and besides, afterwards, she would be able

to astonish her envious neighbours and acquaintances by introducing him as *our* friend, the Count von Arenberg.

At seven o'clock the carriage was despatched to the station, and the widow herself had been careful to see that not a splash of mud sullied the varnish, and that the coat-of-arms on the panels was not obscured in any degree by dust. Although the weather was hot, costly furs were piled into the carriage, for the Frau had an eye to effect, and she knew that real furs with crimson lining always made a grand show in a carriage.

During the interval the Frau performed her toilet, and ordered Bertha to array herself in all her finery, and under no circumstances to come down without her diamonds.

When Frau Schmidt emerged from her room she was indeed a study. Her hair had been dressed with scrupulous care, and was adorned with a red and white rose. She wore a low-bodied dress of exquisite peach-bloom silk, with an immense train, edged with the snowiest of real lace frills. On her bare white arms she had a profusion of costly bracelets, and round her neck, with a large cross lying on her panting bosom, was a chain of large diamonds and pearls.

It was a little after nine when the carriage returned. The servants had already been mustered in the hall, each one wearing his or her best clothes, and white cotton gloves. In a few minutes Peter, radiant and ruddy, rushed into the salon to greet his mother, and when he had affectionately embraced her, he turned to his friend and said—

"This is my mother. Mother, this is my dear friend, Count von Arenberg."

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE BRINK.

WHEN he left Zurich, Joseph Courrette had no very definite aim or purpose. He intended to go to Paris, though what to do he did not know, and he intended to stop at Geneva for a day or two on his way to Paris. Now his reason for going to Geneva was this. For two or three years Schmidt and Sons, of Zurich, had had in their employ a man of about thirty years of age, by the name of Michael Chansky, a Pole. This man was a draughtsman of great skill. He spoke Russ, as did also Joseph, for Joseph's parents knew the language, and had taught it to their son. The result of this was that Joseph and Chansky became very friendly. Chansky was rather a mysterious sort of character, for no one knew where he came from, who his relations were, nor in fact anything at all about him. He took all his meals in a café, and had lodgings in a humble quarter in Zurich. Suddenly he announced his intention of leaving his employment, giving no reason beyond that he wanted to go. And, notwithstanding that Schmidt and Sons offered to increase his wages, for he was a clever workman, and they did not want to part with him, he persisted in going.

The night before his departure from Zurich he told Joseph that he was going to Geneva, and that when he got there he would send him his address, so that if Joseph should ever go to Geneva he could call upon him. This address was duly sent, and several letters passed between Chansky and Joseph.

When the latter decided on leaving Zurich it was but natural that he should think of taking Geneva on his way to Paris, for Chansky was the only person he knew out of Zurich.

Joseph, although unacquainted with Geneva, had no difficulty in finding his friend, although Chansky lived five flights up in one of the very oldest houses in the old town. The street was called the Rue d'Enfer, not an inappropriate name, for it was an ill-smelling, dismal thoroughfare, which climbed up the side of a hill, and the class of people who inhabited it were a very questionable class ; while the houses were for the most part dens. This street is somewhat improved since the time of which we write, although it is but little better now.

Joseph found that his friend occupied three rooms. One of them, however, his bedroom, was a mere cupboard. The others were his sitting-room and work-room. There was a large square deal table in this latter, and it and the floor were strewn with plans and draughts of various kinds, but to the uninitiated they would have been unintelligible. Chansky did not receive Joseph in this room, but in the sitting-room, and as he had had no intimation of his coming he was greatly surprised to see him. Chansky was about the middle height, with a powerful, almost Herculean, physique. He had intensely black hair and beard, a swarthy complexion, with a firm set mouth, indicating great resolution, and smallish eyes, deep set, very bright, and full of intelligence.

He struck one at once as being a remarkable man ; that is a man out of the ordinary. He had cleverness, determination, and originality stamped on every lineament of his face, which at times seemed to wear the expression of a dreamer or an enthusiast. Like most Poles, he was a good linguist, speaking some five or six languages fluently.

"This is quite an unlooked-for pleasure," he said, as he warmly grasped Joseph's hand. "I suppose you are out on a little jaunt, and yet I am bound to confess your face does not wear a holiday air."

"I am not on a jaunt, but I am going out into the world to find forgetfulness if I can, but excitement certainly."

Chansky looked at the other inquiringly, and after a pause asked—

"What does this mean? Disappointment in love, or what?"

"Partly so. But I will tell you all about it by and by. Give me a cigarette, and then let us go to a café, for I want something to eat."

Chansky placed his cigarette case on the table, and being in his shirt sleeves put on his coat and brushed his hair before a piece of mirror that was held in position on the wall by means of four or five nails. He put on his hat, lighted a cigarette, and said—

"Come on, my friend, I am ready."

They descended the long, dark, greasy stairs, gained the steep street, then made their way to one of the cafés that face the lake, and securing a table outside, ordered the garçon to spread a cloth, bring the *carte* and a litre of red wine to begin with. Joseph took a good draught of the wine, for he was thirsty. Then he ordered some soup, to be followed by eggs fried in butter, a poulet rôti, a salad, and a sweet omelette, winding up with a morsel of gruyère. Next followed the inevitable black coffee and cigarettes, and being in a better frame of mind after his substantial meal, Joseph was enabled to look about him with more complacency.

Within a biscuit throw of where they sat in the open air rushed the blue Rhone. The lake, calm and glittering in the ruddy light of the evening sun, looked very beautiful, with its magnificent background of the purple Juras, whose softened outlines were clearly defined against a cloudless sky. The well-wooded shores, with the numerous villas nestling amongst the trees, and the white villages scattered about the slopes of the mountains, made up a truly grand picture, to which Joseph was not insensible, for he said—

"This is very fine."

"Yes," answered Chansky. "It's a noble prospect. But now tell me what is your grievance? Why have you left Zurich?"

Joseph told his story in detail, and Chansky listened with manifest interest. When it was finished he remarked meditatively—

"It's the old, old thing. A man is despised because he is poor. Cleverness, honesty, uprightness, go for nothing. It's money. If you have money, though you be a knave with a devil's heart, people will fall down and worship you. But surely you are not going to break your heart, Joseph, because this woman has spurned you."

"Well, Chansky, I may not exactly break my heart, but no man, you know, can be rejected by the woman he has doted upon and feel indifferent. It puts a shadow on his path that is never lifted, and henceforward he always feels that he walks in gloom." He paused, and then added with considerable warmth, "But why should I be despised because I am humble? Those people who have spurned me were as humble as I once."

"Ah, Joseph, my friend, you are young and know little of the world," responded Chansky, sententiously. "It is a grand old world so far as Nature is concerned, but the human part of it wants reconstructing."

"By God, you are right," cried Joseph fiercely, as he banged his fist on the table and attracted the attention of the people seated at the other tables.

"Hush," said Chansky, as he laid his hand on the other's arm. "You are too energetic."

The light had faded off the lake, which was now steely blue, and the Juras had enfolded themselves in deep purple shadows. From various quarters came the sounds of music and laughter, and the air, which was motionless, seemed filled with the ring of merriment. Chansky handed his friend another cigarette, and lit one himself. Then leaning his elbows on the table, and resting his chin on his hands, he said in a low tone—

"You tell me you are going to Paris?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"Have you money?"

"A few hundred francs," answered Joseph, with a bitter laugh.

"And what will you do when they are gone, if you cannot get work?"

"Starve, I suppose, like a disowned dog, be shovelled into a nameless grave, and forgotten in a day."

"Don't talk like a fool. You are too clever to starve; too good to be buried like a dog."

"Phew, what does it matter?" said Joseph, with a still more bitter laugh.

"To you much. To some other people nothing, perhaps," answered Chansky, pointedly. "You must not lose your grip on life and your interest in the world because a woman has rejected you."

"Perhaps you are right," said Joseph, meditatively, "and yet what can I do? I can be nothing more than a slave all my years. My labour and my talent, if I have any, will help to make the fortunes of others. My fortune will be a pittance. In fact I must toil and grovel in order that I may eke out a wretched existence in a world that is filled with plenty but which the few monopolize."

Chansky leaned a little further forward, so that his lips were on a line with Joseph's ear and close to it. Then he remarked in tones that scarcely rose above a whisper—

"What you say is the text of thousands and thousands to whom common bread is a luxury. In my unhappy country Poland, and in Russia, the millions are the slaves, the hundreds are the fortune-holders. Why should this be? Poland writhes beneath the iron heel of Russia, and Russia is a country that is cursed by the acts of her rulers. The day is coming when these things shall be changed. The toiling

masses shall no longer be ground into the dust and driven like dumb cattle. Things must be more evenly balanced. There must be equality. The purse-proud and the selfish must be wiped off the face of the earth, and the poor shall be allowed to see the light of God's sun. For God made the sun to shine upon all alike. There is a new era dawning. Despots have had a long sway, but it is coming to an end. The slaves will soon rend their shackles, and shatter the black hearts of their oppressors."

He had spoken enthusiastically, and had become a little excited, and his eyes were aglow with a strange light. His influence took hold of, and his excitement communicated itself to, Joseph, who exclaimed, but speaking in an undertone—

"I share your sentiments. I have long thought as you think ; and I would throw myself, heart and soul, into any movement that is calculated to hasten the new era."

Chansky grasped Joseph's wrist, and his own hand trembled.

"Come, let us go," he said. They both rose and each lighted another cigarette, then strolled away with their arms linked. "We were forgetting ourselves," remarked Chansky when they had gone some yards. "I saw watchful eyes upon us, and ears were opened to catch our words. One cannot be too cautious, for there is danger in giving vent to one's feelings and thoughts."

They sauntered along the Quai. Music was playing at some of the cafés, the insides of which were deserted, but at the tables outside on the pavement crowds were seated, for the night was sultry. The sky was cloudless, and myriads of stars glittered in the dark blue, and were reflected in the unruffled surface of the lake. Every now and again flashes of sheet lightning brought the Juras into startling and weird relief. The two men strolled on until they had left the cafés far behind, and the laughter and music came to them as a fading echo. Suddenly Chansky stopped, and, with strange abruptness, asked—

"Would you risk your life in a good cause?"

"I would, without the slightest hesitation."

"Would you join a brotherhood that is solemnly pledged to use every endeavour, and sacrifice even life itself if necessary, in order that millions of their fellow-men may be emancipated from a bitter thralldom, and the light of truth and justice may shine upon them?"

"Would I!" exclaimed Joseph, cynically. "I think in my present frame of mind that there is no venture too desperate for me to join. I want excitement. I want to feel that I am not a mere machine wound up to go for so many hours. I want to be assured that I have a right to have hopes and aspirations—that I breathe the free air of God, and not the polluted atmosphere of man."

Chansky grasped his companion's hand with a firm, nervous grasp, and he said in a deep but low voice—

"You have a noble soul, and great deeds may be expected from you. You have within you the stuff that heroes are made from."

"You flatter me," returned Joseph.

"No. I speak the truth. But answer me this. What is your object in going to Paris?"

"I have no particular object. I would as soon go to Berlin, to Vienna, to London, or anywhere else. What do I care where I go to? I have a roving commission. But one thing I am resolved upon. I will labour no more as a mere daily slave."

Chansky linked his arm again in his friend's, and speaking very confidentially said—

"I can put you in the way of gaining independence and fortune, and you will be able to use your abilities in a great and glorious cause."

"You can?" exclaimed Joseph, excitedly.

"Yes."

"What is the nature of the business?"

"I cannot inform you now, but you shall learn later on.

Now, tell me, what are you going to do with yourself to-night ? ”

“ I know not.”

“ Will you share my lodgings with me ? ”

“ With pleasure.”

“ I can make you up a bed on a couch, and you will be comfortable enough. In the meantime I am going to join some colleagues who are all devoted to the great cause we have at heart. You shall accompany me. All you have to do is to be silent and watchful, answering with caution any questions that may be put to you.”

Joseph having consented to go, the two turned back, and strolled towards the town again, as the clocks were striking ten.

CHAPTER X:


PLAYING THEIR CARDS.

As her son introduced Count von Arenberg to Frau Schmidt, she made the most profound courtesy, full of studied grace and artlessness. In fact she had been practising it for many days, and had arrived at something like perfection. Then she extended her jewelled hand to him, and with equal grace he touched it with his lips.

It was one of the supremely happy moments of the Frau's life. A real Count had kissed her hand and she felt that her bliss was almost complete.

"Count," she said with sweet grace, and speaking as if she had been used to associating with Counts all her life, at the same time adopting her habitual patronizing manner. "Count, as a friend of my dear son, you are welcome to Beau Séjour. I trust that in our humble way we shall be able to make your sojourn a pleasant one."

"I am truly flattered and gratified by the warmth of your reception, Frau," returned the Count, with a pleasant smile, and looking a little surprised as he glanced round the elegant apartment with its rich and costly appointments, and at the lady confronting him, whose rich apparel and valuable jewels would have graced even a duchess. As a matter of fact he had not expected anything so luxurious as he now beheld. "My friend here told me that I should find his mother a very agreeable lady, and he might have added one of the sweetest and most charming of her sex."



"Oh, Count," exclaimed the widow, as she put her fan to her face to hide her blushes.

The Count bowed and smiled.

In stature he was a little below the medium height, with broad shoulders and a shapely figure. He had a purely Teutonic complexion, very fair, waxy almost, with towy hair, and a moustache of the same character. His eyes were light blue, and of course he wore spectacles. He had a very military bearing, and was exceedingly graceful in his manner and his movements. His age was about thirty-two, though he looked younger.

"Now, I am sure, Count, that you must be hungry after your long journey," said the Frau. "The chambermaid will show you to your room, and I shall allow you half-an-hour to prepare for dinner; and, Peter, see that your friend Count von Arenberg has everything that he requires."

The Count bowed and retired with his friend, and in about five minutes Fritz, who had been making *his* toilet, came into the salon. His mother in an ecstasy of enchantment threw her arms round his neck, and exclaimed—

"Oh, Fritz, the Count is *so* charming."

Ten minutes later Bertha appeared upon the scene, and as her mother gazed admiringly upon her she thought to herself—

"If the Count is not instantly smitten he must be a fool."


Her mother might well feel proud of her, for she did indeed look exquisite. She wore a low-necked dress of cream-coloured satin that was stamped with cherries, each cherry being attached to a tiny stalk with two leaves. Her train was even longer than that of her mother's. Her hair was dressed with strings of pearls interwoven, and in the front glistened a star of diamonds. On her bosom she wore a large bunch of the choicest flowers, and her neck was encircled by a magnificent diamond necklet.

"Bertha, my dear, you *are* a picture," said her mother, admiringly, and then she added, emphasizing her words by

striking her left hand with her fan as she spoke—"Now, remember this, you are to-night the representative of the dignity of our house, and the possibilities are that you may, if you play your cards well, be able to bring a title into the family. Only think how well it will sound for me and your brothers to speak of you as my daughter, or my sister, the Countess von Arenberg." The Frau laughed a little laugh of self-satisfaction as though the affair was already an accomplished fact.

If Frau Schmidt was enchanted with her noble guest, the noble guest was scarcely less enchanted with the reception he had met with, and the exceedingly good quarters he had apparently got into. The pink and gold bedroom perfectly amazed him, or, to use a word that will perhaps more vividly portray the true state of his feelings to the reader's mind, he was flabbergasted. With a sigh he contrasted this superb and luxurious apartment with his own squalid quarters; with the bare floor, whitewashed walls, and truckle bed in the barracks at Coblenz, and he thought to himself—"I can stand a lot of this kind of comfort and elegance."

The fact is Count von Arenberg liked comfort and elegance exceedingly, but got very little of them. A member of a fairly good German family, which in some far off time had probably been a family of importance, he had been born with aristocratic tastes and a pauper's purse. For, like hundreds of such families in Germany, they had a title but no money. His father had been a worthy enough gentleman, too proud to work, and too poor to support his numerous family in any position but that of genteel poverty. He endeavoured to give his eldest son, the present Count, a University education, but the youth ran a very wild course, and was expelled. He then went abroad, travelled through Austria and made his way into Russia, where for a time his friends lost all trace of him. To them his life and doings in Russia were a mystery. But quite suddenly and unexpectedly he turned up again in Germany after an absence of four or



five years. He was exceedingly reticent as to his Russian experiences. Through some influence that his father possessed he was sent to a military training school. Later he was drafted as a cadet into a cavalry regiment, and soon after, his father dying, he succeeded to the title, and at the time we meet him he had attained to a lieutenancy, and had been eking out existence on his miserable regimental pay.

After reading the foregoing particulars there will be no difficulty in understanding how it was that the Count von Arenberg looked with such appreciative eyes on the luxury of Beau Séjour.

When he had washed off the dust of travel, and had pomatumed and perfumed himself, he was duly conducted by his "dear friend" Peter to the salon where the ladies and Fritz, together with a cousin of Frau Schmidt's, who had been invited, together with her husband, awaited his coming.

The cousin was a young woman who had been recently married, and she was looked upon as the peregrinating news-monger of the family, for it was impossible for her to keep her tongue still about anything. This was the sole reason why she had been invited, for her cousin, the Frau, knew that within twenty-four hours this sweet young creature would have spread the news far and wide that Count von Arenberg was a guest at Beau Séjour.

As the Count entered the room, the Frau led Bertha forward with an air almost of royal dignity, and said—

"Permit me the honour, Count, of presenting to you my only daughter, Bertha."

The Count bowed profoundly, and with an easy grace, for he was certainly a man of polished and attractive manners. But though he concealed his feelings his breath was almost taken away at the sight of the beautiful girl, who came upon him as another surprise. For be it said to Peter's credit, he had not made any boast about his family to the Count, and though he might very justly have spoken of his sister as a handsome girl, he had not even mentioned her

except in the most casual way. And the Count was more than ever convinced now that he had got into exceedingly good quarters indeed, and he thought it was the kindest thing Fortune had ever done for him in throwing Peter Schmidt in his way.

In a few minutes the dinner was announced, and the Frau said—

“Count, will you give my daughter your arm?”

The Frau herself was conducted by her cousin's husband, and Fritz led in the cousin, while Peter brought up the rear *solus*.

The dinner was a *recherché* affair, and in honour of her distinguished visitor the Frau had brought out some of her choicest Rhine wines, to which the distinguished visitor did ample justice.

The Frau had placed the Count between herself and Bertha. Her sharp eyes followed his every movement, and she noticed with an infinite amount of pleasure the attention he paid to her daughter.

“I understand from my son, Count,” the widow remarked during a pause in the conversation, “that you are already well acquainted with Zurich?”

The Count seemed just a little confused as the question was asked, but in an instant answered jauntily—

“Oh, yes; well, that is, I know it fairly well. When I was a youth of eighteen I came on a visit to a maiden aunt who resided here, and she kept me for two years.”

“What was the name of your aunt, Count?” asked the widow.

The Count seemed a little more confused now, but he was evidently a man of ready resource, and for reasons best known to himself did not answer the question, but with a sigh exclaimed—

“Ah, poor thing, she's been dead for a good number of years.”

This was said with naturalness and grace so that the

widow quite failed to notice that it was an intentional prevarication, and the next moment he turned the conversation by asking Bertha if she had ever been in Germany.

"No, I have never had that pleasure. My brothers have often promised to take me, but have never fulfilled their promise yet. Brothers as a rule, I think, prefer to take other people's sisters on a tour rather than their own," added Bertha with a little laugh and a sly glance at Peter and Fritz.

There was a general laugh at this, and the Count remarked with a doleful sigh—

"Alas, it is so, but not infrequently sisters infinitely prefer to be escorted by some one else's brothers rather than their own. Is that not so?"

This remark, and the comical look of wofulness that the Count assumed, turned the laugh against Bertha, and her face reddened, but her mother came to her aid by saying artfully—

"Possibly as a military man, Count, you have often done duty as an escort of that kind?"

"No I assure you——"

"Ah, Count, no denials," exclaimed the widow prettily.

"I see it in your face, you know. Ah, you military men are such dreadful flirts."

"I must claim to be exempted from that sweeping condemnation," said the Count.

The widow purposely ignored his remark, and said—

"Tell me, Count, how is it that amongst my sex there is such a weakness for the military?"

The Count bowed gracefully, and smiled as he answered—

"You do me honour, Frau, to refer to me as an authority in such an important matter. My own impression is that the fair sex prefer the military because they think they have the best chance of speedily becoming widows and marrying again."

"Oh, fie, fie, Count," exclaimed the ladies in a chorus, and the Frau said—

"That is a very sweeping condemnation of my sex, and I must defend them against the charge. My belief is that you military men as a rule are so good-looking, so fascinating in your manners, that you are perfectly irresistible." The Count bowed again, and reddened somewhat, as though he took this specially to himself. The company laughed, and in a few moments the widow added with a sigh—"But, alas, military men are so inconstant, and such gay deceivers."

This point invoked another peal of laughter, and the Count laid his hand on his heart and said with mock solemnity—

"I for one, Frau, plead guiltless to that terrible charge."

"Very well, then, since you plead not guilty you must be duly tried, and be either condemned or acquitted, according to the evidence brought against you," answered the widow, assuming a very grave air.

Of course this sally caused more laughter, and when the Count saw his opportunity he said—

"I am quite willing to stand my trial, feeling sure that I shall come out of it with reputation unsullied."

"We will see, we will see," responded the Frau, archly. "But I am sure you gentlemen are dying for your coffee and cigarettes, so we will retire."

The gentlemen rose as the ladies withdrew. Bertha clung to her mother's arm, and the two strolled into the conservatory, which was lighted with lamps that were enclosed in rose-coloured glass, the effect being exceedingly charming.

"What do you think of the Count, Bertha?" asked her mother, when there was no fear of their being overheard.

"He seems very nice," was Bertha's somewhat languid reply.

"He is absolutely charming," exclaimed the Frau, with enthusiasm, "and so clever." Then, as she tapped her daughter's shoulder with her fan, she added—"Bertha, unless I am very much mistaken, you are destined to become the Countess von Arenberg."

CHAPTER XI.

THE SECRET SOCIETY.

ONE of the bridges crossing the Rhone at Geneva is known as the *Pont de la Machine*, so called because it is connected with the pumping-house that contains the ponderous engine used for pumping the water up to the town. The bridge is an ancient and picturesque wooden structure, and at right angles and in the centre a wooden-railed gangway or supplementary bridge runs, and leads to L'Ile (the island).² Beneath the main bridge is a weir, and the waters rush round the machine-house, which is erected in the very bed of the river, with incredible force and fury. The island is a patch of land, surrounded by the river, which here has a tremendous current on both sides. The supplementary bridge alluded to gives access to the old part of the island, which is a perfect rookery, and here are to be found some of the oldest houses in Geneva. They are tall ramshackle places—dingy, gloomy, ill-smelling, and mysterious. Entrance to these houses is generally by a stone archway, and circular stone staircases, which are lighted by slits in the wall, so that even on a brilliant sunshiny day the places are gloomy and ill-smelling, and one has to grope one's way. At night-time, with scarcely an exception, the stairways are left in absolute dark-

² The old wooden bridge here described no longer exists, as a new and handsome iron structure was erected in its place a few years ago. The engine-house has also been swept away, a new one having come into existence lower down the river.—*The Author*.

ness, for the inhabitants of the houses are miserably poor, and it seems to be nobody's business to light the passages or the stairs.

The houses are the worst on the left-hand side of the island, where they are built partly over the water, being supported by huge piles driven into the ooze, and horizontal beams placed on top of the piles. The lower stories of the houses, therefore, are only separated from the water by the flooring. The current here is extraordinarily powerful, and the water deep. Even the strongest swimmer would find the greatest difficulty in making headway against it, while a body thrown in would be sucked beneath the surface by the swirl and swept down into the stormy waters at the junction of the Arve and the Rhone, subsequently finding a resting-place in the spot already described as the *Perte du Rhone*.¹

Chansky led his friend, Joseph Courrette, through the town to the Pont de la Machine, which they traversed to the wooden gangway alluded to, and thence to the island. As they reached the low stone doorway of one of the houses on the left, Chansky said, "Give me your hand and I will lead you." This was necessary, for there was not the faintest gleam of light. They made their way down a passage that smelt like a tomb, then descended two or three stone steps, and Chansky knocked on a door. Presently the door was opened by a hideously ugly old woman, her

¹ The condition of things here described has been somewhat altered within the last few years, for about half a mile below Geneva the Cantonal Government has erected extensive buildings containing hydraulic machinery for supplying motive power to factories that are to be built, as well as water to the town. The foundations of these buildings are on archways placed in the bed of the river, the openings of the archways being protected by iron gratings. The consequence is that the current of this left arm of the river has been very considerably lessened, while it stands to reason that anything thrown in the water would not go further than the iron gratings of the archways. At the date of the story, however, the river was exactly as described.—*The Author*.

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emaciated body scarcely hidden by the rags she wore. She carried a small lamp in her hand, and held it up to see who the visitors were. Recognizing Chansky, she said in a raspy, guttural voice—

"Ah, good evening, Monsieur Chansky." Then, looking at his companion, she asked, significantly, "Who is your companion?"

"Oh, he is all right. He is a friend of mine, and I am responsible for him."

"Good," and as the old hag admitted them she closed the door behind them, and secured it with an iron bar.

Joseph found himself in a low-ceilinged room, that was horribly foetid, and contained a small bed that was covered with repulsively dirty-looking clothes. A table and a broken chair were the only other furniture.

Chansky told his friend to follow him, and he opened another door that gave admission to a much larger chamber furnished with a long wooden table, a bench or two, and several chairs. Beneath the floor the water rushed, and the sound it made was very peculiar and begot in one a feeling of insecurity and uneasiness at first. A window opened on to the river, but it was screened by a faded red worsted curtain.

Some six or seven men were seated in this room. They were melancholy looking men. All of them dark complexioned, with pale, thoughtful faces. Each one was smoking either a cigarette or a cigar. The atmosphere of the room was thick and pestilential, and the smoke blurred everything with a haze. As the new-comers entered all eyes were turned upon them, and Chansky was greeted with cries of "Bonsoir, Monsieur Chansky. *Comme ont allez vous ?*"

Although the question was not directly asked, the looks of the men decidedly said, "Who is the stranger and what does he want here?"

Chansky contented himself with saying—

"This is a friend of mine, Monsieur Courrette. He comes from Zurich, and has been in the employ of Schmidt and Sons. He is true as steel."

Then he placed a chair for Joseph, and he sat down himself, and the two soon added their quota of smoke to the already thick cloud that made the atmosphere suffocating.

In a few minutes several more men entered, then there was another short interval, and the number was swelled by an additional three. In the course of ten minutes the door opened, and a man entered alone, and his entrance was the signal for all to rise and salute him as *Monsieur le President*. This man was known as Paulitschke. He was a striking looking man, tall of stature, though slightly bowed now, with pronounced, rugged, and somewhat Jewish features. He had small, steel grey eyes, and a high, square forehead, about which his silvery grey hair fell in ripply folds. He wore a thick moustache and a long, venerable-looking beard. The hair on his face and head was silver grey. His complexion was sallow, and his face knotted and gnarled. No one could look upon him for the first time without feeling that he was gazing upon no ordinary man. The high, massive forehead, the keen intelligent eyes, keen in spite of age, the resolute expression of the face stamped him at once as a man who could sway men. His bearing was dignified, and his manner deliberate and calculating.

"I am a little late, gentlemen," he said, speaking in the Russian language, "but I could not help it. I had some other and important business to attend to."

This club, for club it was, was known as the "Liberty Club" (*Société de la Liberté*). Its ostensible object was to succour distressed Russian subjects resident in Switzerland, and to a large extent it did do so, but its real object was a far different one to that. Its members numbered many hundreds, and although this old house overhanging the roaring Rhone was nominally their club-house, they met in various places according to circumstances—sometimes at the

house of one or other of the wealthier Russians in the neighbourhood, sometimes in cafés, and occasionally in the woods. They were, in fact, a political body bound together by a common cause, and by rules that were as rigid as the laws of the Medes and Persians, and any infringement of which was punishable with death. This punishment, however, was only inflicted in case of any of the members proving a traitor to the cause, or betraying any of the secrets of the brotherhood.

The President took his seat at the centre of the long table, and the rest of the members gathered round him. Then Chansky rose up and said—

"Monsieur le President, I have taken the liberty of introducing into our gathering a friend of mine, Joseph Courrette." He turned to Joseph, and told him to rise, then resuming his speech—"This is my friend, and I beg to present him to you. I crave to have him admitted to our society. He speaks our language, he sympathizes with our cause; he is staunch, trustworthy, and desperate."

The President fixed his eyes on Joseph, and scrutinized him keenly. Then he asked in Russ :—

"Are you Russian?"

"No."

"What is your nationality?"

"I was born in Germany."

"How is it you speak our language?"

"My parents spoke it, and they taught it to me."

"Are your parents still living?"

"Yes."

"Where are they?"

"In Zurich."

"Why are you here, then?"

"I left Zurich clandestinely, because I could no longer consent to be treated like a dog, to be ground down into the mud, to lead the existence of a white slave, while those who profited by my labour scorned me, and treated me as if I was part of the dregs of the earth."

"That is a good answer," said the President, as his eyes grew brighter. "What is your trade or profession, Joseph Courrette?"

"I am an engineer."

"That is a useful trade. Now tell me, Courrette, are you willing to ally yourself to our cause?"

"Yes."

"And to identify yourself with our hopes and aims?"

"Yes. I am willing to do anything, go anywhere, undertake any task, however desperate."

"You promise well," said the President, "and if you are admitted into our brotherhood we may give you a very severe test."

"I care not how severe it is!" exclaimed Joseph with emphasis.

"Very well. You will retire for a little while until I consult with my colleagues. Brother Chansky, take your friend out, and then return."

Chansky motioned Joseph, and they went out together into the outer room, where the hag-like woman was sitting at the table darning an old stocking that had already been frequently patched, and the original materials of the foot seemed to have entirely disappeared. She fixed her glassy eyes on Joseph, but did not speak. He sat down on the edge of the bed, the only seat that offered itself, and lighted a cigarette, while Chansky returned to the meeting-room. Presently the old woman asked—

"Do you come from Russia?"

"No," he answered curtly, and she went on with her darning, asking no more questions, and he made no remark, but he sat thoughtfully, and pondering on what had passed, thinking occasionally of Bertha, and wondering what the future held in store for him.

He waited nearly half-an-hour before Chansky came out again, and told him he was to return to the meeting-room. When he re-entered he found that the members had ranged

themselves round the room, but the President still occupied his seat at the centre of the table.

"Joseph Courrette," said the President solemnly, "your friend and our brother, Chansky, has given us some satisfactory particulars about you, and after having discussed the matter we are disposed to admit you as a member of our Société, and to claim service from you. It is my duty to tell you that the benefits will not be all on one side. Our members who require it receive pecuniary aid whenever necessary, and good reward is bestowed on those who render us faithful service. If you are elected one of our body you may be called upon to perform a journey, a desperate journey, during which your life will be at stake, and may even be forfeited. Are you willing to undertake such a journey, and at such risks?"

"Yes, quite willing," answered Joseph, unflinching.

"Good. I like your style and your manner. In three nights from now you will present yourselves here again to take the oath and be admitted, and you will also become a witness, in all probability, of a sad but necessary act, which will serve to impress you with our tremendous power. Till then, adieu."

Joseph bowed, and he and Chansky went out together, and when Joseph reached the open air he took in a full, deep breath; for the suffocating atmosphere of the room had made him feel faint. The night was sultry, and the rushing water all around sounded deliciously refreshing, but its hoarse roar seemed to have something threatening and ominous in it. The two men gained the bridge and returned to the town. Although the hour was late, the music was still playing at the various cafés, outside of which crowds of people still sat drinking and smoking, and laughing and chatting, as though life was all gaiety, and the world was without sorrow and pain, and there was no plotting of men against men.

"Will you take something?" asked Chansky.

"Yes, I will take some black coffee and a petit verre."

They sat down at one of the tables on the pavement, and gave their order, and sat for some time in silence.

Midnight struck. The people had been gradually going away, and only two or three loiterers were left. The music had ceased. The glaring lights outside of the cafés were being extinguished, and the places were closing. The river sounded hoarsely in the growing stillness, and the great mass of the Juras looked very solemn and weird as they loomed up blackly against the starlit sky.

"Chansky," said Joseph, as they rose to go, "what is the journey I am to take?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Can you tell me, then, what the President alluded to when he said I should be a witness of a sad but necessary act?"

"No, I cannot answer that either. Have patience, and in a few nights you shall know all. Come, let us go to our lodgings, for I am tired." Then after a pause he added musingly, "Life is a strange riddle. I wonder if death gives us the answer!"

CHAPTER XII.

FISHING IN UNCERTAIN WATERS.

SCHMIDT AND SONS had an agency in Cologne for the sale of their machinery ; and a day or two after Count von Arenberg's arrival at Beau Séjour a letter was despatched from Schmidt and Sons to their agent in Cologne. The letter was marked " Private and confidential," and it requested the agent to make cautious inquiries about Count von Arenberg, and to transmit any information acquired as soon as possible. A few days later the answer was received, and this was it :

" Replying to your esteemed favour, I have the honour to inform you that, acting on your instructions, I proceeded to make some inquiries about the person you name, and from the most reliable sources I am in a position to furnish you with the following information. The family of Arenberg received their nobility in the middle of the sixteenth century for military services. For over a hundred years they were exceedingly wealthy, but reverses of fortune deprived them of their estates, and they became gradually reduced. The father of the present Count was very extravagant although almost penniless. He had a large family, but not one of them seems to have done any good. The present Count was rather wild in his youth. He was in Russia for a time, but I can obtain no particulars as to what he was doing there. On his return to Germany he entered the army, and holds a lieutenancy. He is stationed with his regiment at

Coblence on garrison duty. I have not been able to learn anything against his character. In fact, he seems to be much respected in his regiment and by those who know him. It is said, however, that he is utterly penniless excepting his regimental pay, which, as you are no doubt aware, can only be small, as the officers in the German army are poorly paid. Unlike most unmarried German officers, the Count, it is said, has no mistress. That is probably because he cannot afford to keep one, and is not due to any extreme virtue."

Frau Schmidt, for she was the firm in this instance, read the letter with the keenest satisfaction. The poverty of the Count she cared not one atom for so long as his character was good. In fact, his poverty was rather a recommendation in her sight, because it would make him more tractable, more dependent, and consequently more easily handled.

"Bertha will have a big fortune," she thought, "and I will take good care that it is very strictly settled on her."

Up to this time, although the Count had been a guest at Beau Séjour for some eight or nine days, he had not uttered one word, or done a single act that could be construed into anything but ordinary courtesy and attention to Bertha such as any gentleman would have shown. Therefore, it almost seemed as if the Frau was counting her chickens before they were hatched. But she was a shrewd woman and a discerning woman, and she entertained no doubts in her own mind, the Count could be netted at the proper time. Every morning she urged her daughter to make herself peculiarly agreeable to the Count. Bertha had certainly come to admire him, for he possessed the art of making himself pleasing to ladies. Nevertheless she could not bring herself to look upon him in any other light than an agreeable guest who would soon take his departure, and forget her, and be alike forgotten.

Her thoughts, as a matter of fact, were constantly running upon Joseph Courrette, and she wondered why he hadn't

answered her loving letter. As day after day passed and no answer came, she began to upbraid him in her own mind, and at last to feel downright angry, as it occurred to her that he had determined to give her up.

On the twelfth day after the Count's arrival her mother said to her—

"Bertha, has the Count shown any signs of making love to you?"

"None whatever, maman."

"Umph, it's very strange."

"Why strange, maman? Do you really wish him to make love to me before you know anything at all about him?"

Bertha had not been informed about the letter of inquiry.

"Do I really wish him to make love! Why, of course I do; and you surely will not be so idiotic as to throw away the chance of calling yourself the Countess von Arenberg. And I may tell you that I have made every inquiry about him through our Cologne agent, and the information I have received is in every way satisfactory."

As this was said, Bertha's heart beat a little more rapidly, and for the first time, and quite believing that Joseph had given her up, she began to think that to be able to call herself Countess would be exceedingly nice.

"But, maman, the Count has said nothing, and surely you would not have me make advances."

"Certainly not, child," cried her mother, with indignation in her voice.

"Besides," Bertha continued, "for aught you know, he may already be in love with some lady."

"Such a thing is possible, but I don't think it is so. At any rate, I will find out. You can busy yourself this afternoon with the invitations for the ball, and the Count and I will drive out together. I'll guarantee that before we return I will have brought him to book."

A little later, as the Frau and her guest drove along in

the superb carriage, the Count lolling back on the cushions and thinking that without such luxury as this life was not worth living, she suddenly said—

"I am sorry to think, Count, that your visit is drawing to a close."

"Alas, yes," he returned, with a sigh. "My leave only extends to another eight days, when I must return to my duties."

"I suppose that the life you lead in a garrison town is a very lively one?"

"On the contrary, Frau. It is all work and but little pleasure. The duties are excessively hard."

"Why don't you give up soldiering, then?"

"I must do something, Frau, seeing that my father could bestow upon me nothing but an empty title."

"Make a rich marriage, then," the Frau remarked, as she held her gold scent-bottle to her nose.

The Count's face turned a little pale, and he seemed slightly confused as he raised himself from his reclining and listless position, crossed his hands in the embroidered arm-loop, and stared vacantly for some moments at the mountains on the horizon.

"The answer to that remark, Frau, is easy," he said at last.

"What is it?" she asked, as he paused and looked away to the mountains again.

"Young ladies with fortunes nowadays are not easily found," he replied.

"Perhaps you haven't looked in the right quarter."

"Perhaps not," he answered, absent-mindedly.

The widow was disappointed. She thought to have drawn him out, but he seemed disinclined to be communicative in any way. There was a lull in the conversation, and then she said, as she noticed his doleful looks—

"I hope, Count, I haven't touched any tender chord."

"Oh, dear no," he exclaimed, breaking into a laugh.

She felt relieved, and said—

"I declare I thought you were perhaps the hero of some little romance."

Once more did the colour fade from his face, and he seemed to positively start, asking in a voice that betrayed some nervousness—

"What do you mean, Frau?"

"Well, it occurred to me, Count, that you were probably desperately in love with some penniless beauty."

"Pray accept my assurance that you are in error," he said with decision.

"Then you are heart whole?"

"Quite."

The Frau felt that she was brought to a standstill, and she scarcely knew how to proceed; but still she did not intend to give in, and after pointing out some beauty spots in the scenery to him, and making a few commonplace remarks, she resumed the attack—

"You know, Count, we all have our little romances at some time or other. There has been one quite recently in my own immediate circle."

"Indeed, and may I inquire what it was?"

"Well I have no objection to tell you, for I hope I may have the honour of looking upon you as a close friend of my family." The Count bowed and smiled. "The absurdity of the thing," she went on, "is really laughable, although at the time I felt somewhat annoyed. You will have noticed the good-looking servant of mine, Anna Strubholtz."

"Yes."

"Well, I take a great interest in the girl, and was anxious to secure a husband for her in the person of a rather handsome workman in the employment of my firm. I promised her a *dot* of four thousand francs and all the necessary household linen, but the fellow absolutely rejected her and the four thousand francs, and wanted my daughter."

The Frau broke out into a laugh, but it was a forced laugh. The Count laughed in sympathy, and exclaimed—

"Your daughter!"

"Yes. Could anything be more ridiculous? Only imagine it, you know! A common, vulgar workman, aspiring to the hand of a delicately-nurtured and well-brought-up young lady, who is heiress to nearly a million and a half of francs?"

The Count opened his eyes wide, and seemed to catch his breath, as he echoed the words—

"A million and a half of francs!"

"Yes," answered the widow, with assumed nonchalance, as though she thought the sum a mere trifle. "I believe that Bertha's fortune won't be far short of that altogether. I am her guardian and trustee, and I have the legal power of withholding her fortune from her for several years should she make a *mésalliance*."

"And what has become of the workman?" the Count asked with ill-disguised eagerness that did not escape the Frau's notice.

"Oh, I soon packed him off about his business. He got into prison for being mixed up in some vulgar brawl, and left the town in disgrace."

"Did your daughter—— Pray pardon me for asking the question—but did your daughter show any partiality for the workman?"

"*Really*, Count?" exclaimed the widow in a tone of indignant surprise.

"Forgive me," he returned quickly, "but when you spoke of a little romance I thought perhaps that the romantic part of the story was that your daughter had deigned to notice him."

The Frau sniffed at her scent-bottle and then fanned herself, as though the bare insinuation of such a thing had overcome her.

"Dear me, no," she exclaimed, with a disdainful toss of her head. "However could you dream of such a thing?"

"I hope I have not offended you," he said with anxiety manifest in his manner.

"Oh, not at all, Count; but the idea is really so ridiculous."

The Count seemed to become abstracted again, and the Frau did not interrupt his reverie, but she felt sure that the million and a half of francs were whirling through his brain, and that her daughter would certainly become a Countess, and she smiled to herself as she thought that she had managed the business with a diplomatic skill that was worthy of an ambassador. After a considerable pause, during which they had drawn near to Beau Séjour, again the widow asked—

"Is it not possible, Count, for you to get an extension of your leave? Really we seem to have had so little of you, for the time has passed so rapidly. I know my dear sons would be delighted if you could prolong your visit. Besides there are so many beautiful places in the neighbourhood that you haven't yet seen. In fact, I was going to propose that you should accompany me and my son Peter and my daughter to Wallenstadt."

"I can assure you, Frau, that I shall be truly delighted, and will write to-night to ask for an extension of leave."

The Frau could not conceal her delight. She felt that she had won a victory—a victory, however, that was only a prelude to a greater one.

When she went to her dressing room her daughter followed her, and inquired if she had enjoyed her drive.

"Immensely," exclaimed the Frau, not able to conceal the excitement she was labouring under. "The Count is going to apply for an extension of leave, and I have asked him to accompany me and you and Peter to Wallenstadt."

"To Wallenstadt!"

"Yes, I thought it would give you and him a little more chance of being together, and I may tell you this, Bertha, that the Count is yours for the winning, and if you go the

right way to work you will be Countess von Arenberg just as surely as I am talking to you now."

Bertha smiled as she answered—

"Remember, maman, there is many a slip betwixt the cup and the lip."

"Bertha," exclaimed her mother sternly, "if there is any slip in this case it will be entirely your own fault, and I have to request that you will consider it your bounden duty to do all that you may do with propriety to become the Count's wife."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OATH AND THE TRAITOR'S DOOM.

THE perilous course into which Joseph was drifting, and into which he knew he was drifting, did not alarm him in the least, nor cause him to falter. His mother and father had from the time he could remember always cautioned him against having anything to do with secret societies, but that caution went for nothing now. Unrequited love had made him terribly desperate, and he was ready and willing to embark upon any enterprise, however wild or dangerous, so long as it promised him excitement. If it had been possible for Frau Schmidt to have truly gauged his feelings, and have discovered how devotedly and intensely he loved Bertha, she might, in spite of her silly vanity, have been more lenient to him, and have treated him more as an equal and less as a labourer.

Joseph Courrette was not an ordinary man. That is, he was not one of the vast number of human asses who are content to take all the blows and whacks without a murmur or a protest. He had faith in himself. He believed that he was capable of filling with credit to himself a position infinitely superior to that in which his lot had been cast. A man who has this belief is never contented, and frequently becomes a cynic, often something worse if his feelings are trifled with and his hopes are mocked. And there is nothing, perhaps, that can so effectually pervert the moral nature of a man of this kind as disappointment in love. It

is true that such a man is apt to be exceedingly unreasonable, because he is very apt to aim at heights that are impossible to be reached. Nevertheless he is keenly sensitive, often morbidly so, and any shock to this sensitiveness is calculated to make him dangerous.

Joseph found in his friend Chansky, who was such a man as here described, a kindred spirit. But Chansky, however mistaken he might be in his ideas, however wrong as to his social views, was neither depraved nor cruel. He was simply an enthusiast, but there were scarcely any lengths to which that enthusiasm might not lead him. He was a confirmed Nihilist, and he believed that Nihilism was the sole means by which Russia could be regenerated. In Joseph he saw, as he thought, a most valuable recruit to the great cause that Nihilists had at heart, for the youth was impressionable, smarting from a wrong and desperate, and it was by such instruments as Joseph that the dangerous schemes of Nihilism were to be carried out.

It was on this account that Chansky was prompted to introduce his friend to the secret society, and to urge upon his colleagues to receive the young man into the brotherhood. No hesitation was felt on this score when Joseph's position was explained, and when they saw how intelligent he was. There wasn't one who did not believe him to be a most valuable acquisition, and that he could be made useful to undertake a desperate mission. Nevertheless it was determined that at his initiation he should be impressed with the power of the body he was going to join. It was felt desirable that he should see at once that these men, who had bound themselves together to work for a common cause, were not actuated by any frivolous spirit; but that, while preferring to live, they were quite willing to die, if it were necessary, in the interest of the cause they had espoused.

On the evening of the third day, as they were about to start for the old house on the *Ne*, Chansky said to his friend—

"Joseph, at this the eleventh hour, I ask you whether you are desirous of reconsidering your decision to join the brotherhood to which I belong? The step forward is easily taken, but to go back again will be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible."

"I have nothing to reconsider," answered Joseph decisively.

"Remember," urged Chansky, "that you cannot even claim connection with our unhappy country. It is true that I am by nationality a Pole, but, as you know, the Poles bear undying hatred for barbarous Russia. Exiled by our Russian rulers from my own country for no other offence than that of loving her too well, I feel that my mission now is to use every endeavour, so far as I in my humble way can, to strike a blow at Russian despotism. You have no such incentive, however. Therefore you should consider well whether you ought to embark on a course that may cost you your life. Remember if I were not warmly attached to you I should not thus caution you. I do it out of the friendship I bear for you."

Joseph was much moved, and he grasped his friend's hand warmly.

"You are a noble fellow," he said, "but your caution, while appreciated, is unnecessary. My mind is made up. Why should it not be? Disappointment has made me indifferent about myself and I care not what I do."

"Good," said Chansky, as he returned the warm hand-grip. "Let us go."

It was a very different night to that of three nights ago. The weather had changed, and the sky was filled with great black masses of ominous clouds. The Rhone roared more hoarsely, and the driving wind lashed the surface of the lake into fury. Over the long line of dark Juras the lightning flashed in fitful gleams, and great drops of rain told that a storm was about to burst.

As the two men reached the street, Chansky said, "We had better hurry, for we are going to have a downpour."

They walked at a rapid pace, but they had scarcely reached the bridge of the Machine when the sky seemed to be rent in twain by an awful flash of jagged lightning that was followed almost instantaneously by a crash of thunder that shook the earth, and was deafening in its appalling roar. The rain commenced now to fall in a deluge, and Joseph and Chansky ran as hard as they could across the bridge, and gained the old house, but not before they had received a drenching.

Chansky knocked at the door three times, then waited for a few moments, knocked once, waited again, knocked twice, and gave vent to a hiss. After a pause the door was opened, but not by the old woman, although she was in the room, but by a tall and exceedingly powerful-looking man.

He greeted Chansky, and received an assurance from him that Joseph had a right to be admitted. The two then passed into the inner room, where about a dozen men were already assembled. The atmosphere was less oppressive than on the previous occasion, as a ventilator in the wall was opened. As he entered Joseph noticed in one corner what seemed to be a large bundle on the table, the bundle being covered with a black cloth. It was an obtrusive-looking object, but what it was it was impossible to tell, for the room was but poorly lighted, and the corner was in shadow.

No one present was smoking, and all seemed to be strangely silent, or when they spoke to each other they spoke only in whispers.

More men continued to arrive rapidly, and presently the President himself came upon the scene. At this time no fewer than sixty men were crowded into the room. But there was no confusion, for they sat against the walls on forms, leaving the centre space of the room entirely clear. There were several men also in the outer room, and to those the President gave some orders. Then a strange silence fell upon the assembly ; a silence that was only broken by the

crash of the thunder, the hiss of the rain, the roar of the river. The President muttered a prayer in a low, scarcely audible tone. When it was finished, a man entered with an image of the Virgin Mary having the infant Saviour in her arms.¹ The image was placed on the table in front of the President, who ordered Joseph to come forward and stand with his hands behind him, to fix his eyes on the image of the Virgin, and under no circumstances to look round.²

When he had placed himself in the required position the President rapped four times on the table. Then the door was opened again, and a remarkable sight presented itself. Four men entered, but they were enveloped from head to foot in a black robe that covered them like a sack, two holes being left in the head-part for the eyes. The appearance of these figures was startling in the extreme, and what was even more startling was that each man carried in his hand a formidable-looking dagger.

Two of these strange figures placed themselves on each side of Joseph, holding the points of their daggers so close to his face that had he turned to the right or left he must have cut himself with the sharp points of the weapons.

He took all this in at a glance, and though a little startled he did not lose nerve in any way, for he was quite sure that no harm to him was meant. The lamp that hung suspended from the ceiling was now turned very low, the consequence being that the room was so dark that it was difficult to distinguish anything. But a small lamp with a reflector was lit and placed on the table in such a position that its light fell full upon the image of the Virgin. Then the table with the bundle that Joseph had noticed in the corner was lifted

¹ The reader need scarcely be reminded that the Virgin bearing the Saviour, is, next to the Cross, one of the most revered symbols of the Russo-Greek Church. In every house in Russia almost such an image is found, and it is regarded by the peasantry with superstitious awe and reverence. In the presence of this image the Russians always cross themselves most devoutly.

² Joseph Courrette was a Roman Catholic.

by two men and placed immediately behind Joseph, and this done a solemn and impressive silence ensued, and the gurgling of the water beneath the floor sounded strangely weird. In about five minutes the President rose and said—

“Joseph Courrette, give me your left hand. Now place your right hand on the image of the blessed Virgin Mary.” When Joseph had done this, the President continued in grave and solemn tones—“Joseph Courrette, we understand that by your own free will and wish you come amongst us and are desirous of being enrolled as a member of this brotherhood. Is that so?”

“It is.”

“Then it is my duty to inform you that our object is to free our beloved country Russia from the yoke of despotism. There is not one of us present who is not a victim to this despotism. We are all exiles driven by brutality and cruelty from the land of our birth, and a price is set upon our heads. In our sorrow-stricken land tens of thousands of our countrymen groan beneath the curse of infamous laws, and the burden of unjust taxation. The Czar on his throne, and his myrmidons who surround him, keep their grip upon the poor country, and no man can breathe freely. The police are infamous spies, who will sell a man's life for half a rouble. The magistracy is corrupt, and justice is a burlesque. Poverty and misery are rampant, and happiness is unknown beneath the crushing weight of this monstrous form of despotism. Our object is to free our country from this curse. We would do it by peaceful means and without bloodshed were that possible, but it is not, and therefore we have to be merciless, and to strike the enemies of our country without pity and without remorse. To sweep the Czar from his throne, to break his power, to destroy his corrupt ministers and infamous advisers, and to bring light and peace to millions of men, women, and children in our groaning country, are our objects and aims. For these things we devote our lives and sacrifice everything, and as we die others

take our place, and so the brave work goes on. And now that you have heard this brief recital of our objects and aims, I ask you for the last time if you are still willing to join us, for even now at the last moment you are at liberty to retire if you wish to do so ? ”

“ I do not wish to retire ; I am perfectly willing to join you,” Joseph answered, in a firm voice.

“ That is good,” said the President. “ And now, then, you must take the oath of fidelity to us. Repeat the words that I say to you—‘ I, Joseph Courrette, hereby solemnly vow and swear, before Almighty God, and with my hand on the image of the blessed Virgin Mary, that I join the Brotherhood of the Society of Liberty of my own free will and consent, and that I will honourably and faithfully be true to the Brotherhood, placing all my money, all my knowledge, all my resources, and my life at the disposal of the Society. And I further solemnly swear and vow to preserve the secrets of the Society, and never, by look, word, act, or deed, to betray them, even though my life is in jeopardy, and I will die rather than reveal aught I know. I also swear to devote myself to the cause of the Brotherhood, doing everything that it is possible for a man to do to promote its aims and objects, and from this moment I bind myself to the Society, and will willingly and without a murmur obey the instructions of the President or his officers, and will go to any part of the world I may be required to go to. All these things will I do faithfully and truly, or may the curse of heaven fall upon me.’ ”

The President uttered these words slowly, forcibly, and in a deep, resonant voice. And to add to the dramatic impressiveness of the scene, a tremendous flash of lightning illumined the chamber, and was followed in a few moments by a burst of thunder that was like the roar of a battery of artillery.

Joseph repeated the words, and felt greatly affected, for truly the incidents and surroundings were calculated to impress any one.

When the oath was finished there was a solemn pause. The sounds of the gurgling water seemed to be intensified, the wind moaned, and the rain sobbed.

Then, still standing, the President, addressing the assembly, said—

“Brethren, our new brother has in your presence taken the solemn vow that binds him to us, and now tell him what the penalty is for the slightest violation of that vow.”

“*Death!*”

Was the one word uttered in unison, and almost as if by one voice, by the whole assembly. It was terrible in its earnestness and impressiveness, and as the word burst forth, as it were, the four men in the black robes placed the points of their daggers to Joseph's throat, and the touch of the cold steel made him shudder.

There was another solemn pause. Then the President said—

“You have heard the doom pronounced of those who become traitors to us, and now behold evidence that that doom is rigorously carried out.”

At this moment the lamp was turned up full, and the four men in black taking Joseph's arms turned him round, and with horror he beheld on the table spoken of the corpse of a man. The body was that of a man of apparently thirty-five or forty years of age. The face bore traces of intense suffering. The cheeks had fallen in, the lips were puffed out, the eyelids were open, and the glassy eyes stared up to the roof, while the hands were clenched, and the nails seemed to be buried in the palms, indicating that before his death the unfortunate man must have suffered terribly.

Joseph started back at the dreadful sight, and almost felt as if he would faint, for the shock was so sudden.

“It is not often, I am happy to say,” remarked the President, “that we have such ghastly evidence of our power to punish as this. The dead man you see there was a dangerous traitor, and was seeking to sell his knowledge to the police.

For money's sake he would have betrayed us ; for money he would have blasted the hopes of tens of thousands of Russians himself. Such a traitor was unworthy to live. And yesterday, he was lured here, and met his doom. It is only the second case within a period of nearly twenty years. The last was that of a man of noble family, and of his wife, who was still more highly connected. They had joined our order, but subsequently repented, and fearing from their high connections that they might destroy us, we struck the first blow. The man was drowned in the lake. The lady would have been allowed to escape, but at the Morgue she kissed the dead body of her husband. That kiss sealed her own fate, and she fell that night. They left a boy-child of some two years of age. We would have taken the boy and brought him up, consecrating him to our cause, but he was carried away, and now we are each and all pledged to sacrifice him whenever and wheresoever we may find him, lest in revenge for the death of his father and mother he should prove dangerous to us. Some day some of our members will meet him, and then his doom will be sealed unless he swears fidelity. I tell you these things, because you are now one of us, and I wish to impress you with a sense of our terrible earnestness, and if you showed any signs of becoming traitorous to us, even within the next half-hour, your life would pay the forfeit. You could not escape. The world would not be large enough to hide you."

"I shall not betray you," Joseph faltered, feeling faint and sick, and wishing that he was out of the place.

"You will be trusted," said the President, "and in a few days you will be sent upon a mission to Russia. It is a dangerous mission, but as you are young, and not a Russian, you may succeed. Should you do so you will be amply compensated for the danger you run. And now we have one more act to do, and the proceedings will terminate."

He made a sign as he spoke to the four men in the black robes, and they proceeded to one side of the room, and one

of them stooped down, and by means of an iron ring lifted up a trap-door, disclosing the rushing water beneath. Then all present rose and turned their faces to the wall, but Joseph stood spell-bound and horror-stricken at what followed.

The four disguised men approached the table, and lifting the corpse up, they carried it to the open trap-door just as a peal of thunder shook the building. They poised the dead man for a moment, and then shot him head first down into the water. Simultaneously with the act all present exclaimed—"So perish traitors!"

The trap was shut; the table was put back into the corner. The four cloaked men, looking like hideous ghouls, filed out of the room, and the President, addressing the assembly, said—"Brethren, the proceedings are terminated for to-night. You may disperse. But be cautious, silent, and watchful."

Joseph felt like a man in a dream. He had a vague knowledge that his friend Chansky took his arm and led him out, and with a great sigh of relief he found himself in the open air. The rain was still falling. Lightning was playing about the Juras, and the thunder growled amongst the mountains, while the river, in its hoarse roar, seemed to Joseph's ears to utter a monotonous refrain of—"Traitor, death; death, traitor."

CHAPTER XIV.

HOOKE AT LAST.

AFTER that conversation with Frau Schmidt during the drive, Count von Arenberg began to take a very different view of matters to what he had done before. The million and a half of francs perfectly fascinated him, and he felt that in his poverty-stricken condition hardly any sacrifice that he could make would be too great if he could only acquire such wealth. It has already been stated that the Count was fond of luxury, and the few days he had spent in the sumptuously-appointed Beau Séjour had made him more than ever dissatisfied with his position. But now he began to dream of something very different. The Frau had filled his imagination with all sorts of possibilities, and a golden opportunity had suddenly presented itself; so suddenly and unexpectedly, in fact, that it came as a sort of shock, and, so to speak, took his breath away.

That evening when he went to the gorgeous pink-and-gold bedchamber to dress for dinner he threw himself into a chair, and began to cogitate and to bite his finger-ends after the manner of a man who is troubled and puzzled. His face expressed anxiety and care.

"A million and a half," he murmured, still dwelling upon that subject. "By Heaven, it's a big sum. Dare I do it? Pshaw! Why not? All danger is surely passed."

He had been so absorbed with his reflections that he noted not the time, and he was aroused by the chamber-

maid tapping on his door and telling him that the dinner was waiting.

He hurried into his clothes, and descended somewhat flurried and flushed, and blurted out an apology for having been so long.

The Frau was all graciousness and smiles, and said—

“Pray make no apologies, Count. It is I who ought to apologise for disturbing you, for I see that you have been indulging in a little nap.”

The Count was more than ever confused, and was about to stammer out a denial when the widow saved him by saying—

“I beg that you will make no excuse, for I myself felt quite sleepy after the drive.”

The Count smiled at getting out of the difficulty so easily, and he was particularly lively during the dinner, paying great deference and attention to the Frau, so that she was still more impressed with him, and remarked to her son Fritz later on that the Count would be a very valuable addition to the family.

The following morning was a very busy one with Bertha and her mother, who were engaged sending out the invitations for the ball. The Count's services were requisitioned, and two or three times, on the plea of being wanted elsewhere, the Frau contrived to leave her daughter and the Count together. But either his courage had failed him, or he could not quite make up his mind as to the course he would pursue, for he gave no sign to Bertha that he had designs upon her heart. And occasionally he appeared so absent that she had to rally him. One thing he did do, and that was to despatch an application to Coblenz for an extension of his leave.

In sending out her invitations for the ball, Frau Schmidt included every one of note in the town, as well as every one with whom she had the smallest acquaintance. She was determined that on this occasion she would surpass herself.

The Schmidt balls had gained some local celebrity, but this one was to be the talk of the town, for it was not every day that she had a real live Count to exhibit, and she took good care to include amongst her invit  s the editor of every paper in the place.

The ball-room of Beau S  jour, which had been specially constructed for the purpose, was a very handsome room indeed, the floor being as level as a die and as smooth as glass, while the walls were chastely decorated in the Italian style, amber and blue being the prevailing colours. The ceiling was artistically painted to represent an evening sky flushed to crimson and gold with the setting sun. One door opened into a conservatory, and from the conservatory another doorway gave access to a lawn. The Frau had this lawn covered with boards and carpeted, and a grand marquee erected thereon, the marquee being connected with the conservatory by a covered alley. On the night of the ball supper was laid in the marquee, which was magnificently decorated with plants and brilliantly illuminated with coloured lamps. The whole scene, in fact, was one of fairy-like splendour, for the Frau had spared no expense, and had done everything on the most lavish scale.

The Count was perfectly well aware that all this was in his honour, for he could no longer be blind to the fact that the Frau had designs upon him. Yet, nevertheless, he wished once or twice that he had never come to Zurich, and he was almost prompted to say on the morrow that circumstances called him back and he must leave immediately. He shook this feeling off, however, and at length resolved to make the plunge, for the million and a half lured and fascinated him.

Of course, the Frau made him the lion of the evening, and many were the silent sighs that were uttered by the disappointed ones who failed to become his partner during the ball. For these wealthy bakers, candlestick-makers, retired tailors, and the miscellaneous assortment of personages who

went to make up the "aristocracy" of Zurich, were the most arrant of snobs, notwithstanding that they gloried in calling themselves Republicans. But if you want to know how a title is worshipped, you must go to a Republican country to learn.

The Count was Bertha's partner three or four times before supper, and very soon it began to be whispered about that Widow Schmidt was "angling" for him for her daughter; and when supper was announced, and Bertha and the Count went in together, there seemed to be no longer any room for doubt that an engagement was on the *tapis*.

After supper Frau Gemshardt, whose husband kept a sort of rival establishment to the Schmidts, went up to Frau Schmidt, and with a most gracious and benign smile said—

"My dear Frau Schmidt, what a *delightful* evening it has been, to *be sure*, and *how* charming the Count is. Really we are all indebted to you for this great treat. His attentions to *dear* Bertha are most noticeable, and I suppose I may even venture at this early stage to congratulate you on the prospects of such a son-in-law. Really it will seem so strange when we have to speak of Bertha as the Countess."

"My dear Frau Gemshardt, you are jumping to a very hasty conclusion," returned Frau Schmidt loftily, and yet experiencing the very keenest sense of satisfaction, for these two women hated each other with venomous hatred, and Frau Schmidt knew that her "dear Frau Gemshardt" was writhing with jealousy, for though she had striven to be considered one of the leading lights of "society," she had neither the means, the grace, nor the tact for the position. Frau Schmidt never invited her to any of her social gatherings, but made an exception on this occasion because she knew how exquisitely she would be tortured and consumed with envy.

Frau Gemshardt tossed her head as she exclaimed—

"Oh, I am sure I am very sorry if I have made a mistake,

but you know every one in the room has noticed the Count's attentions to Bertha."

The Frau Schmidt thrilled with a sense of unutterable bliss as she heard this, for nothing could have gratified her soul more.

And the Frau Gemshardt, as she waddled off to her husband, a coarse, big-footed, bald-headed man, said, with a snarl, for she was burning with indignation at the snub she had received—

"Ach Gott! Only to think that such a stuck-up, purse-proud wretch as the Frau Schmidt has the impudence to dream of getting a Count into her family! It would be more to her credit, I think, if she married Bertha to some honest workman. But there, the cheek of some people is inconceivable."

Daylight had dawned when the last dance, a waltz, came to an end, and the wearied, pale-faced, jaded-looking people began to scramble for their cloaks and coats and shawls. The Count had been Bertha's partner in this *finale*, and as the music ceased, he drew her hand over his arm and said—

"It is terribly hot. Will you take a little stroll with me in the garden?"

She consented, and they walked through the crowded room, passed through the marquee, where coffee was being served, and so out into the garden.

The air was delightfully fresh and cool. The sky was a clear, transparent azure. Not a cloud flecked it, save away to the east where a long bank of wool-like vapour with a crimson edging hung. The distant Alps, with their snow crests all golden as they caught the beams of the rising sun, looked like the mountains of a vision, so exquisitely delicate and airy were they in the clear atmosphere. The birds were singing everywhere, and the scent of the awakening flowers was delicious.

The Count and Bertha walked down the garden arm-in-arm for some distance without speaking, for they had

scarcely yet recovered from the exertion of the dance. At last the Count stopped, and turning to her, he laid his hand on hers which encircled his arm, and said abruptly—

“Fräulein Bertha, you have been my partner several times this evening in the dance, and now I am going to ask you if you will be my partner for life.”

She looked at him with downcast eyes. The sudden and abrupt manner of his proposal startled her, and her breath was fairly taken away. But she managed to say—

“Really, Count, this is very unexpected, and requires time for consideration.”

“Take time,” he said, “but let me have your answer soon, for I know now that I love you.”

She blushed and was confused, and a mist seemed to come between her and the trees, and only in a dreamy way was she conscious that he had kissed her.

She got to her room somehow, and was glad to throw herself into a large chair and rest a little. Presently her mother, having seen the last of the guests away, came to her, looking very fagged and pale.

“Well, dear, you and the Count have been the observed of all observers,” she said, proudly.

Bertha threw her arms round her mother's neck and murmured—

“Maman, the Count has proposed to me.”

“Thank God!” exclaimed the Frau, excitedly; “my dream is fulfilled.”

CHAPTER XV.

ON A PERILOUS ERRAND.

FROM the moment that Joseph Courrette left the old house on the isle after his terrible experience there he was a changed man. He had a little while ago looked forward to a domestic life of comfort and peace. But now that seemed to him impossible. He had embarked on a perilous enterprise ; he was launched on stormy waters, and all around him the horizon was dark and threatening.

Now that he was a sworn member of the Nihilist Society Chansky took him into his confidence, and told him that a desperate plot was being planned for the assassination of the Czar of Russia.¹ Chansky himself, being a draughts-

¹ It is a matter of history now that the Nihilists plotted against the life of the late Czar many years before their purpose was effectually accomplished. It has been said that at least a hundred attempts were made to encompass his destruction, and if this is true it shows that the precautions taken for his safety were very effectual, or the efforts of the Nihilists very weak. The reader will remember that on one occasion shortly before the Czar's death a house was hired near the line of railway by which on a certain date His Majesty was to travel. From this house three or four men and two women worked for many weeks with extraordinary patience, and with almost superhuman labour, to construct a tunnel from the house right under the railway. Beneath the railway a large chamber was made, and this was stored with dynamite and guncotton, the whole mass of explosives being connected with electric batteries in the house. At the moment when the mine should have been fired, as the Royal train passed, the batteries failed. Had the explosion taken place the conspirators must have been blown to atoms. As it was, three were captured and executed, one of them

man, had been commissioned to prepare certain plans of the well-known forts of St. Peter and St. Paul at St. Petersburg, in which political prisoners are confined and tortured. Chansky had been confined in these forts for a long time, and had effected his escape ; consequently he knew them, and it was hoped by the conspirators that with his aid the release of several leading Nihilists might be effected.

One of the main difficulties that Nihilists abroad had to contend against was that of communicating with their fellows in Russia. The rigid and sleepless surveillance exercised over all letters entering the country made it next to impossible that this means of communications could be used. While all Russians returning to the country were subjected to such severe rules with which they had to conform before permission to enter was given, that the conspirators had little chance of escaping the argus eyes of those who were sleeplessly on the watch.

Chansky was aware of all this, and therefore he saw immediately that Joseph might be invaluable because he was young, he was not a Russian, and had not been in the country before. Consequently, the probabilities of success were all in his favour.

A week after his initiation, Joseph was summoned to appear before the President and the assembled brotherhood, and he then received instructions as to his mission. He was to start at once for St. Petersburg and take with him a communication written with chemical ink on a peculiarly prepared vegetable paper. This paper was as soft and limp as a piece of satin and was incapable of being torn by any ordinary means. The chemical nature of the fluid used for the writing was such that when it was dry it entirely dis-

being a woman. A fourth escaped. This kind of fanaticism almost defies analysis, and one can only wonder that men and women can be found who are willing to sacrifice all, even life itself, for the sake of a chimera. It is well known that the murder of the Czar did not make an atom of difference in the government of the country.—*The Author.*

appeared leaving not a trace of any kind on the paper, nor could it be restored by the ordinary methods of heat. To reproduce it it was necessary to put the paper into a chemical bath, and after some four or five hours the material became opaque like a very thin slice of ivory, and the writing could then be read by means of a very strong light behind the paper. When once the paper-leaf dried again the writing could no more be reproduced. This paper, as well as the process by which the writing disappeared and was reproduced again, was the invention of a celebrated Russian chemist, who had espoused the Nihilist cause and had fled to London, where he died of consumption a few years ago.

Joseph was provided with a new waistcoat made by one of the fraternity, a tailor, and between the lining and the cloth of the waistcoat the precious document was sewn. In addition he was to carry a draft for a large sum of money. The draft was drawn by a French bank, and was payable through their agents in St. Petersburg, a well-known Russian bank. But the money could not be drawn by any one except the actual person named in the advice, therefore if the draft did not reach this person's hands the money would not be lost. The money was to be used for the support of people who were engaged in spreading the doctrines of Nihilism, and in defending prisoners on their trial. He was further provided with a forged passport, made out, however, in another name. He was instructed to represent himself as a German, knowing no word of Russ, and he was going to enter the service of a well-known merchant in St. Petersburg, a German-Jew by the name of Solomon Cohen, who had been in Russia about twenty years. He was told he must exercise the greatest prudence, caution, and tact, or his mission might fail, and it was of the very highest importance to the brotherhood that it should not do so.

Joseph was a little elated at the prospect of his journey, for it promised what he wanted, namely, excitement and adventure. His thoughts were ever with Bertha

Schmidt, and it was impossible for him to prevent some feeling of bitterness, not so much against her as against her mother. He considered that he had been badly treated, and that he had been despised and scorned on account of his poverty. This very naturally begot in him a taint of cynicism, and he wished to do something that would give him notoriety, something that might come under Bertha's notice, and cause her keen pangs of remorse.

Ah ! if he had only got that letter of hers, how different might his fate have been, while the storms that were to beat upon him might have been avoided. But it was not to be. Fate had willed it otherwise, and he must go on.

Having made a few hurried preparations he left Geneva on the following morning for Russia. And as he had been instructed to travel second class in order not to arouse any suspicion, and second-class trains on the Continent being always slow, he was in consequence five days on the journey.

At the Russian frontier his papers were examined, and having been duly viséd he was allowed to proceed, and on the fifth day he found himself in St. Petersburg. At this time the vigilance exercised at all the Russian stations was remarkable, and deception was frequently detected. Yet notwithstanding this the Nihilists managed to hold communication with their colleagues in the country, and Joseph was to prove himself an adept, and an exceedingly useful instrument.

All new arrivals had to go before a government official, who had a special bureau at the railway station. Here papers were examined, and luggage overhauled, to see if there was anything of a compromising nature. The newcomers were also subjected to severe cross-examination. They were asked where they had come from, and why they had come, and a variety of other questions, all calculated to confuse and betray a person not thoroughly on his guard.

Acting on his instructions, Joseph had booked in the first

instance to Berlin, where he stayed a day. Then he had rebooked, so that his ticket showed that he had come from the German capital. His luggage, moreover, consisted of a bundle containing a few clothes and odds and ends such as a workman was likely to have, and in addition a basket filled with tools. At the bureau he assumed utter ignorance of the Russian language, and an interpreter who understood German had to be procured. To this individual he appeared as a somewhat dull sort of young man, and when he stated that he had been engaged as a workman by Solomon Cohen he was allowed to go immediately, and one of the officials remarked to another—

“That fellow seems a fool, and old Cohen, I should say, has been taken in.”

Joseph proceeded at once to Mr. Cohen's house, which was situated near the wharves, and in the busiest part of the town.


Cohen was a Jew. A Jew in thought, in appearance, in manner, in his greed for gain. It might be easy to say what he was not, but exceedingly difficult to say what he was, for he combined so many things in his business. He was a supplier of stores to ships. He was a contractor for road repairs. He was a provision merchant, a machine maker, the proprietor of a little newspaper, a general dealer. He was a German in heart and soul, and hated Russia with an undying hatred, but he was careful to conceal this hatred. He had been in Russia for twenty years. He had married in his own country, his wife being a Christian lady and a very beautiful woman. They were both young, and went to Russia to seek their fortunes, having a girl then of four years of age. For ten years Solomon toiled early and late, and accumulated money. Then one day during one of those popular outbursts of fanatical hatred which manifest themselves occasionally in Russia, Cohen's house was attacked and wrecked. Everything he possessed was taken from him, and he and his wife, who was in delicate health, and his child, barely escaped with their lives. In fact, so great was

the shock to his wife that she never recovered from it, but gradually sank, and died within a month.

Solomon thus found himself a widower, and homeless and penniless in a foreign land. Some of his co-religionists gave him and his girl temporary shelter, and he applied to the government for compensation for the injuries and the loss he had suffered. But all his applications were fruitless, and he did not get one single rouble. Then arose within him a dangerous hatred for the country of his adoption. He set to work to build up a new business, and at the time we meet him he had his hands full, and though he was always pleading poverty, there is little doubt his exchequer was fast refilling. With such consummate tact did he conceal his true feelings that he was never once suspected, in fact, was looked upon with extreme toleration, and a few years before had got a municipal contract for the repair of certain roads. But his longing for vengeance never ceased ; his monetary loss and the death of his wife could not be forgotten. His vengeance might sleep, but would not die. He had the Jew's patience. He knew how to wait.

His daughter Rebecca was about four-and-twenty, and was celebrated throughout the neighbourhood for her beauty. She was as dark as night, with eyes like sloes and bright as the evening star. White teeth and red lips, small ears, a clear olive complexion, and a great wealth of black hair, combined with a small, well-rounded figure, made up her attractions. She shared her father's hatred for the country in which she lived. And she was even a keener and more dangerous plotter than he was. But notwithstanding this she had his caution, tact, and patience.

Solomon Cohen had long ago allied himself to the Nihilists, and had proved himself one of their staunchest, one of their most faithful, one of their most valuable allies. And what made him so valuable to them, and so dangerous to the government, was that he had never once been suspected. No one imagined for a moment that in this persecuted,



patient, plodding, long-suffering Jew was concealed one of the most determined, most revengeful, and uncompromising of Nihilists.

Cohen had already been warned of Joseph's coming. This warning had been conveyed in an apparently innocent commercial letter ; but which by certain prearranged terms implied a meaning totally different to what an uninitiated person would have supposed.

Joseph was received by a female servant, a German, for in his household Cohen would not have Russians, though in his business he employed several.

"So you are the new workman the master has engaged?" she said, as Joseph presented himself. "Where have you come from?"

"From Berlin."

"Ah, it's a long journey and you will be glad of food and rest. Come with me, and I'll give you your supper, and then I'll let the master know that you have come, he may want to see you before you go to bed."

Joseph was very thankful indeed for his supper for he had been many hours without food, and when he had done substantial justice to the homely fare set before him he felt considerably refreshed and strengthened. Then the woman came to him and bade him follow her. It was a strange old house with thick walls and narrow passages, and ponderous stoves for heating in the bitter winter. She led the way to a room, the door of which was screened by a massive woollen curtain. It was a large room with a low ceiling. In one corner was the indispensable ponderous iron stove with a convoluted pipe looking like an exaggerated serpent. The furniture was of a very miscellaneous kind, and no one piece seemed to bear any affinity to another.

In the centre of the room, at a large table that was covered with books, papers, and a heterogeneous collection of odds and ends, was Solomon Cohen engaged in writing. A shaded lamp stood on the table, but its light only par-

tially illumined the room. In a sort of recess that contained a window screened by a curtain, Rebecca sat sewing, and a shaded lamp stood on a small table beside her.

"Here's your new workman, master," said the servant, and with this unceremonious introduction she withdrew, leaving Joseph standing there.

Save that he lacked extreme age Solomon Cohen might have stood as a model for a picture of "The Wandering Jew," such as the public are familiar with through prints and paintings. Solomon was only about fifty, but his beard was like yellow flax, and hung far down on his breast. His eyes were dark and deep set, and keen as an eagle's. He had a bald head and wore a skull cap, and was dressed now in an old dressing-gown. He stuck his pen behind his ear, tilted the lamp shade on one side so that the full light fell on Joseph's face. Then he scrutinized him, and after a time said—

"So you are the new workman. Well, you look a likely fellow." He rose. He was about the medium height with good figure, perfectly straight. He went to the door, pulled back the curtain to assure himself that the door was shut, then feeling satisfied, came back to his chair. "And what is your name?" he asked.

"Joseph Courrette."

Well, Joseph, we shall become better acquainted by and by. In the meantime let me present you to my daughter."

At these words Rebecca rose up and came forward with extended hand. As the light fell upon her, Joseph fairly started, for he thought she was the most beautiful woman his eyes had ever seen. She might have stood as a model for one of the grand and picturesque female figures painted by some of the old masters to illustrate Biblical scenes. He took her proffered hand, and she said—

"I am so glad to see a countryman and to grasp his hand. The dear old fatherland! Although I was but a baby when I left it, my heart is with it, and I long to return."

Joseph could scarcely find anything to reply save a few

stammered utterances. He was almost dumb, for she had bewitched him. Her voice was musical, her face beautiful, her hand soft and white ; and she had flashed so suddenly upon him, so to speak, that he was dazzled. She was like the vision of a dream, at least he thought so.

She saw his confusion, and perhaps guessed the cause, for, with a pretty smile that revealed all her white, gleaming teeth, she remarked—

“You will perhaps be making a stay of some little time, so we shall have opportunities for conversation.”

Then she went back to her seat, and Joseph felt relieved, for he was conscious that he had appeared stupid and dull.

Solomon Cohen walked to the door once more to assure himself that it was closed, then coming back to the table he placed his hand on Joseph's shoulder and said in low tones—

“Joseph Courrette, you are in a land where the walls of the houses have ears, and the stones in the street eyes. And if you would not have your every movement known, your every breath that you draw counted, you must be cautious. Do you understand?”

“Perfectly.”

“Good, I will summon the housekeeper, and tell her to show you to your chamber, and I will come to you, for you may have something to communicate.”

He rang a bell, the woman appeared and Joseph followed her. The room he was to occupy was at the very top of the house and immediately under the roof.

In about ten minutes' time Cohen came to him, and on entering the room he locked the door behind him, after having listened to satisfy himself that no one was following him. Perhaps this extraordinary caution was only the force of habit, for his servants were all his compatriots and as faithful as steel.

“You are to be trusted,” he said, “otherwise you would not have been sent here.”

"Yes, I am to be trusted," answered Joseph, with great decision. Then he took off his waistcoat, and with his pocket-knife cut the stitches of the lining and gave the Jew the paper and the draft he had brought.

Solomon smiled as he took these things, and folding them carefully up, put them into his pocket.

"You are a brave lad," he remarked, as he patted Joseph on the shoulder. "Now, good-night, and sleep well."

He left the room, and tired and weary, Courrette undressed himself and got into bed. But he lay awake a long time thinking, and what he thought of was the Jew's daughter, and when at last he did fall asleep her beautiful face followed him into his dreams.


CHAPTER XVI.

A CROSS GAME.

WHATEVER might have been the secret causes which weighed with Count von Arenberg at first, and made him appear reserved, and disinclined to seize the opportunity that presented itself for securing a wealthy wife, those causes failed to operate after he had taken the first plunge, and from the night of the ball, he became a warm and ardent wooer.

For a time Bertha had certain qualms of conscience, and even an intense longing for her early love, Joseph Courrette. But by and by she brought herself into a frame of mind when she could think of him with indifference, and even with some degree of contempt. For as dropping water wears away the stone on which it falls, so did the constant admonitions and ceaseless lecturings of her mother affect Bertha, and at last she came to believe that she must really have blue blood in her veins, and that to stoop so low as Joseph Courrette was an act little short of madness. She was pleased to think she was quite sane now, and she regarded her titled lover with wondering admiration.

It may be doubted, however, whether Bertha possessed any real love for Count von Arenberg. Her vanity had been awakened, and she was flattered by his attentions, and began to think how grand it would be to be called Madame la Comtesse von Arenberg. But it is extremely probable that had she been capable of analysing her feelings, and arriving at an accurate knowledge of her own



mind, she would have found that she was only fascinated with the Count, and that her heart was still with Courrette.

The Count understood the art, and understood it thoroughly, of making himself exceedingly agreeable, especially to ladies, and very soon Frau Schmidt came to regard him with admiration that amounted almost to worship. He had obtained his extension of leave, and was now openly regarded in the Frau's household as the future husband of the daughter of the house, although the engagement had not been formally announced. Fritz became very warmly attached to him, and lavished every possible attention upon him.

Peter's admiration on the other hand had toned down a little ; possibly because he was somewhat more practical than his brother, and he saw, or he thought he saw, that the Count was shallow. Not that he displayed any opposition, but he came to the conclusion that a little too much fuss was being made of the Count, and it was not the man so much as his title that was dazzling the household. The Frau found her time fully occupied in escorting her daughter about on the various excursions that she made with the Count, for in the present stage of the wooing it would have been contrary to the etiquette of the country that the young people should have been allowed to go by themselves. Up to the present the Count, while professing to be an ardent lover, had made no formal proposal for the hand of Bertha, and until that was done there was no recognized engagement or contract.¹

The weeks sped away, and the Count's leave was drawing

¹ On the Continent the engagement of a young couple is a very business-like affair, and is formally announced either through advertisements in the newspapers or by means of a circular in which the parents or nearest relatives of the respective parties make known to all whom it may concern, that a marriage is arranged between so-and-so and so-and-so. This circular, which is generally very elaborately printed according to the position of the people, is sent out to every one who has the slightest acquaintance with those interested.—*The Author.*

to a close, and as he had as yet made no proposal, the Frau began to feel a little uneasy, and to think that it was possible that after all the Count had only been amusing himself and enjoying his holiday agreeably. She therefore determined to bring him to book, and with this end in view she sent for him one afternoon to visit her in her boudoir. She motioned him to be seated, and he threw himself into one of the luxurious armchairs, with the air of a man who felt on a perfectly familiar footing, and quite at home.

"My dear Count," began the lady, "I have sent for you this afternoon in order that we may have a little quiet conversation together on a subject that affects us both. Your stay amongst us is, I am sorry to say, drawing rapidly to a close, as I understand you have to rejoin your regiment next week. Is that not so?"

"Yes, I am sorry to say that it is."

"Of course it would be absurd for me to affect to be indifferent to the attentions you have done my daughter the honour of paying her. In fact, as you are no doubt aware, it has become a matter of common conversation. Now, as an anxious mother, I venture to inquire, and I am sure you will not think I am premature, what your intentions really are."

The Count did not appear to be quite easy, and he seemed to look everywhere but at the speaker.

"I unhesitatingly declare that I love your daughter passionately," he exclaimed.

The Frau smiled benignly, and an expression of extreme satisfaction diffused itself over her face.

"It is very gratifying to me to hear that," she said sweetly, "but what is to be the end of it!"

"Frau," cried the Count with some desperateness in his tone and manner, "I should before this have asked your daughter in marriage, but I am utterly without means save my small military pay; and, moreover, I have considerable

debts. And to be honest, I am bound to confess that I have only remote prospects of inheriting money."

"My dear Count," exclaimed the widow warmly, "I pray that you will not let such trifles as those stand in the way of the future happiness of yourself and my beloved child. My daughter is heiress, under her late father's disposal of his property, to a fortune that will not fall short of a million francs, and will ultimately be increased from other sources to a million and a half. Possibly you may deem this amount sufficient to insure your domestic comfort and happiness?"

"Sufficient! more than sufficient!" exclaimed the Count. "It exceeds my wildest dreamings."

"Very well then. Is there any other obstacle in the way?"

The Count's face went scarlet, and the confusion that had on several occasions been noticeable in his manner asserted itself strikingly, though it is doubtful if the Frau observed it, for her infatuation with his title blinded her to everything else, and it never for an instant occurred to her that there might be some black pages in his life's history which would make him an undesirable husband for her daughter.

"No," he said, "there is no obstacle in the way."

"Good. Then you are willing to engage yourself to Bertha?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Then we will have the engagement duly announced. And the day of your union can be fixed to suit your own convenience."

"What happiness," sighed the Count. "It is necessary, however, and I sure you will not blame my candour, that I should ask you to place me in a position to be independent of my creditors; and I should also like to purchase my discharge from the army."

"And what do you think you will require altogether to purchase your discharge and pay your debts?"

"I don't exactly know, but, roughly speaking, I should say probably about a hundred thousand francs."

He said this reluctantly and with some hesitation, as though he was under the impression that the largeness of the sum would make the refusal of his request a certainty. He was, therefore, agreeably surprised, nay, more, he was utterly amazed, when the widow replied in a *grandiose* style—

"Oh, my dear Count, that is a mere trifle, and I will see that the amount is placed in your hands before you go away."

"Then all difficulties are swept out of my path," he cried, joyfully, as he sprang up, and throwing his arms round her neck, kissed her on both cheeks, and said—

"I salute you as my dear mother."

"And I you as my son-in-law. Now, go and prepare for a drive, and I will tell Bertha to make herself ready."

Ten minutes later she went to her daughter's room, and taking her to her breast, kissed her warmly, and said—

"I salute you, my child, as the Countess von Arenberg."

"What do you mean, maman?" asked her daughter, breathlessly.

"I mean that I have settled all, and you are to be the Count's wife. In two days the engagement shall be announced."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STAKES ARE WON.

FRAU SCHMIDT's elation at the prospect of the marriage between her daughter and the Count von Arenberg reached such a pitch that, as the saying is, she "lost her head." Fritz, her son, shared her joy, though he thought his mother had been a little precipitate, but Peter was not quite so enthusiastic. Not that he was one whit the less anxious than his mother to get a title in his family, but he was of a more calculating and deliberate nature. And he began to think that something like unseemly haste was being displayed, and that as Counts, like other folk, were very human, it might possibly be advisable to have a better acquaintance with Von Arenberg before he was admitted a member of the Schmidt family, the said family being people, in their own estimation, of great consequence.

Peter ventured to lay his views before his mother, but that lady waxed wroth at what she was pleased to consider "unworthy suspicion."

"I take all responsibility on my own shoulders," she said, "and you may depend upon it I shall not go wrong."

Peter knew his mother's disposition too well to attempt argument with her in her present frame of mind. She was not the woman to be thwarted with impunity in anything upon which she had thoroughly set her heart. And so he simply shrugged his shoulders and held his peace, and even in a vague way came to the conclusion that, after all, his

mother might be right ; for, in common with his sister and his brother, he believed his mother was one of the cleverest women the world had produced.

Frau Schmidt lost no opportunity of giving all the publicity that she could to the engagement, and she resolved that her daughter's marriage should be one of the grandest affairs Zurich had known for a long time.

In the course of a few days after the engagement had been made the Count took his departure, having first of all been placed in possession of a very considerable sum by the confiding widow. This act drew forth a very strong remonstrance from Fritz, who loved money for money's sake. Not having quite the same confidence as his mother, where money was concerned, he considered that a very unnecessary risk was run in entrusting so large a sum to a man they knew very little about, even though that man was a Count. The Frau, however, was indifferent to the remonstrances of her son, and said that she was at liberty to do as she liked with her own money, an argument that Fritz could not refute, and so he held his peace as Peter had done.

It must not be supposed from this that Fritz was prejudiced or had any objection to Count von Arenberg. On the contrary, he was not less anxious than his mother that Bertha should marry well, and he even smiled with pride as he thought how nice it would be to be able to speak of "my brother-in-law the Count," and "my sister the Countess." But, when it came to parting with so large a sum to the Count, it was another matter, for Fritz liked to look at money twice, as the saying is, before parting with it, and he could not help thinking that in the present case his mother was precipitate to rashness, and he himself was anxious that more should be known about the Count before Bertha's fortune was entrusted to his care. But Frau Schmidt did not share this view ; and, in fact, so anxious was she to secure the Count as her son-in-law that there must have been something very strong indeed against him for her to

have noticed it. What she would have considered a glaring sin in an ordinary mortal she would have looked upon as a very venial offence in a Count.

In a very short time Bertha had become infected with her mother's views, and was equally unwilling to hear the lightest word breathed against her future husband. That she really loved him was very doubtful, but she was most certainly infatuated now. And yet occasionally her thoughts wandered to Joseph Courrette. But she tried to be angry with herself, and in a certain sense was so, for thinking of her plebeian admirer. Had she been capable of fully understanding her own feelings she would have found that, however much she might be dazzled at the idea of becoming a Countess, her heart was in the keeping of Joseph Courrette, and no other man had ever gained her love as he had gained it. However, she was living now in a kind of dream state, and excitement prevented her dwelling earnestly upon anything, for she and her mother had a great deal to get through, and their days were spent in that, to the feminine mind, most delightful of all occupations—shopping. The very best stores of Zurich were, in a sense, ransacked. But this was only for the odds and ends, for Frau Schmidt, while she would have resented fiercely any imputation on her want of patriotism, believed, as most of her countrywomen do believe, that the art of dressmaking only attains perfection in Paris. Whether there is something in the Paris air, or other occult causes perfectly undefinable, that is congenial to the development of this art, it is difficult to say, but certainly in Switzerland, as well as in America and England, it is thought that Parisian dressmaking cannot be excelled. This is unquestionably a feminine fallacy; but it would need more than mortal powers to convince the female mind of the fact. At any rate, Bertha's trousseau, or the greater portion of it, was to be provided from Paris, for it seemed like heresy to suppose that a Count's wife should be dressed in any other way but Paris fashion.

As can well be imagined, Beau Séjour presented a scene of great activity and bustle during the weeks that intervened before the marriage.

Summer had passed, and autumn was waning. Already the orchards were stripped of their golden stores, and the sefe brown leaves of the trees were swirling to the ground. Cold, nipping winds swept the lake, and the mountains were whitened with the early snows down to their bases. Damp mists crept up in the evenings, and enveloped the town, throwing an air of gloom and sombreness over the place, and which tend to make Zurich in the winter one of the most cheerless towns imaginable. But the external gloom affected not Beau Séjour or its inhabitants, who were so occupied with the coming great event that they could give no attention to the weather. The pleasant villa was full of warmth, light, and brightness. Half-a-dozen dress-makers were busy with needles and scissors ; while scarcely an hour of the day passed without the arrival of a fresh parcel of something or other to add to the accumulating wardrobe stock of the bride-elect. Bertha herself had plenty to occupy her time. Every morning's post brought her a long letter from her lover, and every evening's post carried an equally long letter from her to him. So that what with reading and writing these precious documents, and trying on garments in the process of making, to say nothing of the exacting duties of shopping, the poor girl had not a minute to spare, and usually retired to bed at night utterly fagged out.

It had been arranged that the wedding should take place in December, by which time the Count would be able to obtain his discharge from further military service. Bertha herself was in favour of having it postponed until well on in the spring, but her mother would not hear of it. The Count came back in the latter days of November, accompanied by a cousin, an insipid, milk-and-water young man, and attended by a male-servant, who had been a soldier.

At last the day fixed for the wedding arrived, and a gloomier, more unpropitious day for a marriage could scarcely have been imagined. A fierce gale lashed the lake into fury, a pitiless snowstorm swept down from the mountains, and the swirling snow hung over the town like a winding sheet.

It was a terrible disappointment to Frau Schmidt, for all the lavish display she had intended to make was now impossible. Moreover, she was a little superstitious, and did not like the idea of her daughter's married life beginning in such atmospheric gloom. At first she had serious intentions of putting the marriage off for a day or two; but all the preparations for the grand breakfast, and the ball that was to be given at night, had been completed, and it would have caused serious disarrangement if the event had been postponed even for twenty-four hours. There was no help for it, therefore, and the ceremony, in spite of weather, would have to be carried through.

The snow fell so thickly that the sky was darkened, and the wind was more furious than ever as the string of luxurious carriages left Beau Séjour to proceed to the church. And when they returned again, when Bertha had become a wife and a Countess, there was scarcely any change. The Frau's spirits, which had been a little dashed at starting, had risen once more, and she was now in the seventh heaven of delight, for her ambition was at last gratified, and she could now speak of her daughter as "The Countess."

To the "Breakfast," which was a most splendid affair, and would have done credit to a Royal household, a company of a hundred persons sat down.

Some hours later the Countess and her husband left amidst ringing cheers and a shower of rice and slippers, for the station, as they were going to spend their honeymoon in Germany.

Thus ended the first act in this little domestic drama. Whether the succeeding acts were to be as brilliant remains to be seen.

About a week after the marriage, and while the town was

still talking about it, for it was generally admitted to have been a grand affair, a young man by the name of Klingele, who was in the employ of Schmidt and Sons, and was the bosom friend and confidant of Joseph Courrette, wrote a long letter to his friend in St. Petersburg, and the following is an extract from the letter :

"The news that I have to give you is not such as will cause you joy, but you made me promise you that I would tell you of every movement, so far as I could, of Fräulein Schmidt. Perhaps you will not be surprised to learn that she was married a week ago to a German, Count von Arenberg. Nobody seems to know much about him, and there has been a good deal of speculation in the cafés as to who he is. Some say that he is an impostor, and that Frau Schmidt has been taken in. It is generally rumoured that he couldn't rattle two kreutzers together, and that the Frau has given him a fortune besides her daughter. The poor silly woman may yet find that she has bought her title too dearly. The wedding was a very grand affair. Every one of us in the works was invited, there being no business carried on that day. Afterwards we had a right royal feast at a café at the firm's expense. Both young Master Peter and Fritz visited us, and made speeches in which they constantly alluded to their sister 'The Countess.' Poor thing ! I saw her in the morning in the church, but it struck me she wasn't looking particularly happy, though she certainly looked unusually beautiful, and was dressed regally. The weather was devilish, and perhaps this somewhat depressed her. The Count is a trumpery-looking sort of fellow, and I thought to myself, 'Well, Fräulein, you have got a title, it's true, but as for your man, he is no more to be compared to Joseph Courrette than a Roman candle is to the sun.'

"I hope this news of the marriage won't be too heavy a blow to you. You must forget all about Fräulein Schmidt now, and I have no doubt that during your stay in Russia you will be meeting with some pretty Russian girl who will take your heart captive."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MYSTERY.

JOSEPH COURRETTE soon felt at home in his new quarters, and was exceedingly comfortable. Solomon Cohen took to him, and saw immediately that not only could he make him very useful to himself, but that he would prove an invaluable addition to the Nihilist forces.

Solomon was a remarkable man, and seemed to be endowed with wisdom that justified his name. Keen, shrewd, calculating, far-seeing, intelligent, and cautious, he was dangerous to the country in which he lived and invaluable to the cause he had at heart. He had espoused Nihilism with great warmth, but he had never allowed his warmth to betray him in any way, and at this time not a shadow of suspicion was entertained against him by the police. To have been able to thus avoid bringing himself under the lynx-eyed myrmidons of the government, who swarmed in every town of Russia like rats, showed that he was no ordinary man, for he was in constant communication with the Nihilist leaders, and he had the threads of the movement in his grasp. But of course he was in a large measure aided by the marvellous tact and skill of the Nihilists themselves. They seemed endowed with some special faculty for selecting the right men. Nevertheless, Solomon Cohen was a man out of many thousands, and by a peculiar affability and courtesy and a seeming frankness and openness he masked his true character.

In his business he went in for anything that would turn over money. He was reputed to be rich, but repute in this case was not correct. Not that he was poor by any means, but he had been unable, owing to a variety of causes, to accumulate money to any great extent. Owing to the miscellaneous character of his business he had no difficulty in finding Joseph plenty to do, and he soon discovered that his workman was clever in many ways, and could turn his hand to a variety of things.

Solomon Cohen's daughter Rebecca was no less renowned for her beauty than her father was for his general knowledge and his business capacity. She had not inherited her father's shrewdness, but her beauty no one could deny. It was of the pure, classical, Jewish type. She was dark as a raven, with delicately chiselled features and a faultless form. As a rule she was strangely silent and reserved ; in fact, she seemed to be rather of a brooding disposition. But there were hidden fires in her nature, and one could not know her long without discovering that she was determined, and even revengeful.

Between Joseph and Rebecca a liking soon sprang up. She displayed interest in him, and he was grateful. He was a young man, far away from his country and friends, and she took a womanly pleasure in being useful to him in the hundred small ways that a woman can be useful to an isolated young man. He would have been a strange individual if he had not reciprocated this feeling, nor could he look upon her beauty without being thrilled with a man's admiration for it. Thus weeks slipped by, and Joseph began to find compensation for his great disappointment, for a strong feeling of friendship existed between him and Rebecca. But it was friendship only so far as he was concerned, as he could not shake himself free from his allegiance to, and devotion for, Fräulein Schmidt. Then one morning he received that letter from his companion and confidant Klingele, wherein was detailed the marriage of Bertha with Count von Arenberg.

The news fell with crushing weight upon him. He could scarcely have believed himself that he would have taken it so much to heart ; but the fact was, in spite of what had passed, he had not abandoned hope that some day he might yet win Bertha. Now the news of her marriage utterly killed that hope and hardened his heart. He felt that he had been befooled by her, for she had frequently solemnly vowed that she worshipped the very ground he walked upon, and come what might she would have him. Yet, in spite of this, she had thrown him over, and married a title. No wonder that it made him a little cynical, and that he inclined to be reckless.

As time wore on, however, he began to ask himself, " Why should I let my heart turn to stone, and waste my life in loneliness, because one woman has jilted me ? "

This question would not have occurred to him, at any rate not so soon, if it had not been for Rebecca's beauty. She was, in fact, bewitching him, though she herself, perhaps, was all unconscious of it. He found himself dreaming of her, and thinking of her night and day. But although she had shown him attention, and been friendly to him, she had not given the slightest indication that she meant anything else by it than womanly sympathy and interest. And so, for some time, he nursed his growing love in silence, resolved to watch her and probe her. But she proved too deep for his probing, and he could not determine whether she bore him any love or not.

Having suffered one disappointment, he shrank from risking another, and he could not muster up courage sufficient to lay bare his heart to her ; for if she spurned him, as he had been spurned at Beau Séjour, he felt that he must quit Russia and become an aimless wanderer.

During his stay in Russia he had frequent opportunities of learning how extensive and powerful was the organization of which he was a member ; and one day he received an intimation that he was to hold himself in readiness to return to Switzerland, where his services were required. He was

very sorry for this, as his sojourn in St. Petersburg had been of the pleasantest description, and he would have infinitely preferred to have remained. Moreover, he was loth to leave Rebecca, and he appealed to her father to see if he couldn't get permission for him to remain. But Solomon seemed to think that this would not be possible. He was quite willing to make the application, for he found Joseph more than merely useful; he found him of almost incalculable value to him in a business sense, and could he have retained him there is little doubt that in time he would have placed him in a very responsible position. For the business was growing, and Cohen felt that a man in whom he could repose the most implicit confidence was necessary to that business, and Courrette was just the man. Taking advantage of the kindly feeling and the interest Cohen displayed, Joseph plucked up courage enough to refer to Rebecca.

"There is another reason," he said, "why I don't want to leave."

"And what is that?" asked the Jew, eyeing him curiously.

"I have come to regard your daughter with great admiration," answered Joseph, boldly.

Solomon's face underwent a complete change, and seemed filled with an angry expression. He elevated his bushy grey eyebrows, and his eyes flashed with suppressed passion.

"Does she reciprocate your regard?" he asked, quickly.

"I know not."

"Have you not said anything to her?"

"No. Never a word." Then after a pause Joseph added, "I hope you are not angry with me. I have admired your daughter silently, and should do nothing contrary to your wishes."

Solomon crossed over to where Joseph stood, and in his deep voice, and speaking slowly and with a certain solemnity, he answered—

"Boy, I am not angry with *you*." He laid a very marked emphasis on the word "*you*," so that Joseph was led to remark—

"I am glad that you are not angry with me, and that assurance on your part induces me to ask if I may hope to win your daughter?"

Solomon seemed much troubled. He even seemed confused, and his usual coolness and self-command appeared for the moment to have deserted him. Joseph noticed that his hand trembled a little, and there was also a tremor about his under lip that spoke of keen inward emotion. Joseph was about to make some remark when Cohen answered, and his voice plainly indicated that he was very much affected—

"You must not hope, because it would be hoping for an impossibility."

"An impossibility!" echoed Joseph in amazement.

"Yes," and Cohen put his hand to his eyes for a moment or two, and then, as if ashamed or annoyed at the weakness he had betrayed, he drew himself up proudly, and repeated with a resolute air—"Yes, an impossibility—mark my words. I repeat, an impossibility, absolutely so."

He spoke as though he was desirous that this should be the final word on the subject, but Joseph found it hard to resist asking the question—

"Why an impossibility?"

"Joseph Courrette," said Cohen with some sternness, "ask me nothing more; at any rate not at present."

Joseph was turning away disappointed and somewhat crestfallen, when Cohen stopped him by exclaiming—

"Stay. Tell me, has Rebecca, think you, any reason to suspect your liking for her?"

"I can hardly answer that. And yet it is not unlikely that she does."

"Very well, then, before your liking becomes passion, address yourself to her; tell her what you have told me,

and you will then learn how hopeless it would be for you to aspire to gain her hand."

Joseph was more and more puzzled. What did this mean? What was the mystery? For two or three days he kept his own counsel, but he watched Rebecca closely, and there were various little signs that he could not help but interpret as meaning that she had conceived a liking for him.

"If she has really any love for me," he thought to himself, "what is the barrier that would prevent her from accepting me?"

He pondered very much upon this problem, until at last he determined to try and solve it. The opportunity to do this soon occurred. Perhaps Solomon Cohen purposely made the opportunity. He had promised to take his daughter to see a favourite opera, but at the last moment pleaded as an excuse for not going that he had some important and unexpected business matters to attend to. Rebecca seemed very disappointed, but he consoled her by saying—

"Joseph Courrette shall accompany you."

And so the beautiful Jewess and Joseph found themselves at the opera together, and Joseph resolved to take advantage of the occasion to speak to her on the subject that lay nearest his heart. He could not do this in the theatre, but did it as they were driving home.

It was winter, and the frozen snow on the ground was like iron. The sky was cloudless, and the stars shone with a brilliancy peculiar to intensely cold climates. Joseph and Rebecca occupied an open sleigh, and were closely enveloped in heavy furs.

"To be with you thus is an unexpected pleasure," Joseph began, as the sleigh sped over the frozen ground, and the bells of the horses jangled harmoniously in the keen frosty air.

"It is a pleasure that is mutual," she returned.

This answer caused the blood to shoot up into his face, and his heart to leap, and it gave him hope.

"I am glad to hear you say that," he replied. "I am glad, because——" He paused abruptly. Somehow the words he would have uttered stuck in his throat.

"Because what?" she asked tenderly, turning towards him.

He gathered courage from her tone and manner, and laying his thickly gloved hand on hers he said with faltering accents—

"Because I love you."

She became much agitated; looked at him for a moment or two, then turned away to hide the tears that gathered in her eyes.

"Have I offended you?" he asked.

"No, you haven't offended me."

"Why are you so agitated then?" She did not answer, and when he had waited some time he said with great earnestness—"Tell me, Rebecca, am I wrong in supposing that you do not regard me with disfavour?"

"Joseph Courrette," she exclaimed, turning suddenly, and speaking firmly, and yet as one speaks who feels a sense of desperateness—"Joseph Courrette, you are sticking a knife into my heart and torturing me."

He was naturally astonished at her strange words, and said—

"You give me a riddle, but I cannot guess it."

"Let it be a riddle then," she answered. "It is better for you that it should remain so."

"No," he said, "for if your words mean ought they mean that you are not indifferent to my appeal."

"How can I be indifferent? I should be a strange woman if I were."

"Then you love me!" he cried eagerly, and leaning towards her until his face almost touched hers.

His question brought back her agitation, and she appeared to be trying to master her emotion and herself. After a time she made answer—

"I love you as a sister may love a brother."

"I want another love," he said, quickly. "I am not your brother, and if you bear me love at all it must be the love a woman gives to the man who hopes to win her."

"Joseph, do not harrow me further," she cried, appealingly.

"Harrow you! What do you mean? You say you love me."

"Yes, with sisterly love."

"But why only with sisterly love? I want your heart. I want your hand. I want you to be my wife."

She put her gloved hands to her face and burst into tears, and he was much astonished to see her so moved, for he had conceived the idea that she had little sentiment in her, and was a woman who could not weep. But here was proof to the contrary. What did it mean? She recovered herself with an effort, and said, a little hoarsely—

"Do not repeat those words, Joseph, for I cannot be your wife. It is impossible."

"Impossible?" he echoed.

"Impossible!" she repeated, with great emphasis.

"What is this mystery?" he exclaimed, in hollow tones.

"Ask me not now. Some day, perhaps, I will tell you. Be a brother to me, and I will be a sister to you, but wife I cannot be."

The rest of the journey was finished in silence. He had no more words. His hopes were dead again, and it seemed to him that he was destined to know nothing but disappointment in life; that sorrow and bitterness were to be for ever and ever his portion. "Why should it be so?" he mentally exclaimed. "Better to die than be a butt for fortune's spite."

As the sleigh stopped before the door of Solomon's house Joseph helped Rebecca to alight, and as they passed in he drew her arm through his. They had to go down a long stone passage that was in utter darkness, and when half-way down, he stopped and said—

"Rebecca, I am going to respect your request. I am going to be a brother to you ; but never forget that, though I act the brother, I love you with a lover's love. Let me for one fleeting moment enjoy a lover's privileges. Let me hold you in my arms ; let me feel your lips to mine."

She made no answer in words, only sighed, and let her head droop on his breast. Then he entwined his arms about her, and raising her face he kissed her passionately. She thrilled beneath his touch. She returned his kisses with equal warmth, until at length she disengaged herself, and whispered—

"It is delicious madness, but tempt me no more, if you love me as you say you do."

"Would to God I were dead !" he exclaimed in his bitterness.

"Do not say that," she answered. "You must live—live to be my avenger !"

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

JOSEPH COURRETTE and Rebecca Cohen seemed to tacitly agree that what had passed between them on that winter's night as they sleighed home from the opera, should not be again referred to, at any rate not for the present. About a week later, Solomon asked Joseph one morning if he had spoken to Rebecca, meaning of course on the subject of marriage.

"Yes," answered Joseph, "I have."

"And what did she say?"

"Practically the same as you said, that it was impossible my wishes could be granted."

Solomon's face darkened as he asked—"Did she tell you anything?"

"No."

Nothing more was said, and Joseph refrained from seeking to fathom the mystery, much as he would have liked to have done so. But he felt that whatever explanation was to be given must come from her, as her father would not speak, though she showed no inclination to clear the mystery up.

Courrette grew very restless and dissatisfied, and an almost unconquerable desire to wander away came upon him. For every time he looked upon Rebecca's beautiful face he felt a passionate longing to possess her, and yet he knew that there was some barrier or gulf between them which he could not break down or bridge over. If she had treated him with

coolness, or indifference, he would have felt the situation less irritating. But she showed for him the greatest friendship and this only served to emphasize the mystery, so to speak.

"She loves me," he thought, "and yet she tells me that it is impossible that she can be to me what I wish."

As time went on his position grew more and more irksome and intolerable, and the cynicism that had sprung up in his heart when he left Zurich strengthened. Occasionally there came over him a fit of desperation, and he felt that he must seek excitement—excitement that would in a measure bring him forgetfulness. At this time he would have gone on any expedition, or have entered on any course that would have given him the excitement he craved for. But for the present he was bound to submit to a monotonous, humdrum sort of life, that varied little from one day to another.

He had not written nor received a line from his parents since he left Zurich, and he was determined not to write until he was in a more independent position. He knew, however, that they were going on well, because he occasionally got a letter from his confidant and friend, Klingele, who gave him news.

It must not be supposed that during all this time that the mission which had taken Joseph Courrette to Russia was abandoned. On the contrary, the plans of a deep and terrible conspiracy were being silently but surely matured, and Joseph learned a little from Solomon, and learned also that when the time came he might be called upon to take an active part. But what his part was to be he knew not, and he chafed under the suspense and fretted at the inactivity he was compelled to endure. During the time he had been in Russia he had gained a great deal of information, for he was naturally of an inquiring turn of mind, and he saw with his eyes and judged for himself. The result was that he came to understand how it was that men sought

to bring about a social upheaval in the country, where barbarism, injustice, cruelty, and corruption were rampant ; and infamous laws pressed upon the toiling millions like yokes of iron, grinding into their very souls and embittering their lives. The result of all this was that the cause which he had at first espoused, simply as one uninterested, but for the sake of finding diversion for his thoughts, came to be viewed by him in a totally different light. He was no longer an uninterested actor, but deeply absorbed in the great drama that was being played, and in which he now longed to take a prominent part. In fact, he resolved that he would not long be a subordinate, but a leader. He was animated by a spirit of enthusiasm, and he desired to throw himself into the breach, and bear the brunt of the battle.

"If I fall," he thought, "what does it matter? There is no one to mourn for me save my good parents, and time will soon assuage the poignancy of their grief."

He mentioned his feelings to Solomon Cohen, but the old man said to him—

"Restrain your ardour, my good boy. Our cause is only to be won by caution, watchfulness, and patience. Have patience, and depend upon it your chance will come, without patience we shall fail!"

About a fortnight after this, in the dead of night, Joseph was disturbed from his sleep by a tapping at his door. It has already been mentioned that the room he occupied was at the very top of the house, and at the extreme end of a long stone corridor. It was quite isolated from the other part of the house, and he had been put there as a matter of caution, because when Cohen wanted to make any communication to him he did it in this room, for the reason that there was no fear of intrusion, and apparently none of eavesdropping or observation.

The tapping having been repeated several times, Joseph, at last thoroughly awakened, sprang from bed, slipped the latch, and throwing open the door beheld, as he expected to

behold, Solomon Cohen, who was in dressing-gown and slippers, and had a black velvet skull-cap on his head. He carried a horn lantern, in which a piece of candle was burning.

"I have something to say to you," he whispered.

Joseph went back into the room. Solomon paused on the threshold, strained his eyes with peering into the darkness that enshrouded the long passage, but saw no living thing and heard no sound. Then he entered the room and shut the door, but about a minute afterwards a figure, like a ghost, glided rapidly along the stone passage, and with no more noise than a shadow would have made. Adjoining Courrette's room was a small recess that contained a window, the only means of light gaining access to the passage. Into this recess the figure glided, and then remained still for some moments. The door of Courrette's room was a very ordinary one, and age and the effects of heat and cold, had warped the planks in their joinings, so that an eye applied to one of these chinks commanded a view of the greater part of the chamber, while conversation carried on inside, if not too low, might be heard fairly well by an ear laid against the door.

The figure would seem to have been aware of these facts, for presently it stepped out of the recess, and kneeling on one knee looked through a chink.

Solomon had particularly chosen this hour of the night in order, as he thought, not to incur the slightest risk. But his very excess of caution had run him into danger, and he was being watched.

He placed his lantern on the table, and sat down on a chair.

"Joseph," he began, "your chance has come at last."

Courrette's face brightened up, and his eyes flashed with excitement as he exclaimed :—

"That is good."

"I have received information from a secret source,"

Solomon continued, "that the work of years is maturing, and a desperate attempt will now be made to bring happiness and peace to this unhappy country. A plot, terrible in its object, but, alas! rendered necessary by the iniquity of our ruler, is perfected, with the exception of a few details. And should that plot be successfully carried out, it will send a thrill through the whole of the civilized world, and bring about a complete revolution in the existing order of things in this country."

"What is the object of the plot?" Joseph asked, as his breathing quickened.

Cohen appeared to hesitate for a few moments, then lowering his voice somewhat, he answered—

"The death of the Czar."

Joseph shrank within himself at this announcement, and for an instant his resolution left him, while his face became deadly pale.

Solomon noticed these signs, and said with some surprise—

"Boy, thy heart is too soft. It should be steel. If you have scruples, withdraw before it is too late. It is better so, for desperate deeds require desperate men with nerves of adamant."

Joseph drew himself up. He seemed to think the remark somewhat reflected on his personal courage. And striking his breast with his hand, he exclaimed proudly—

"You mistake me, sir. I may not be all to count many years upon my head, but my heart has been hardened by rebuffs and disappointment, and I am ready and willing to throw myself into any cause, however desperate, so long as it has justice on its side."

"I meant not to wound your sensitiveness," replied Cohen. "Your courage is worthy of all praise, and depend upon it, it will be put to the test. To-morrow, at midnight, a secret meeting will be held in an obscure quarter of the town to settle certain matters. Your presence there will be re-

quired, and you will be told off to some important duty. You will take your life in your hand, and it is probable that it will be sacrificed, but you will die in a good cause, for we strike for freedom. We aim at ridding millions of our fellows from a tyranny that is worse than death."

Joseph suppressed with an effort the excitement that agitated him, and said, firmly—

"I have no fear of death. And I shall not shrink from doing that which I am appointed to do."

"You are a brave lad," said Cohen, as he rose and grasped the other's hand. "The Lord bring you safe out of the danger," he added with visible emotion. "To-morrow at half-past eleven at night, you will leave the house, and on the opposite side of the street you will notice an apparently forlorn, and wretched, draggled-looking beggar woman, whose rags will scarcely hide her nakedness. She will utter no word, but whither she goes you will follow. Do not lose sight of her. She will lead you to an old house about a mile from here on the quay. She will stop for an instant before the house, and then pass on. The entrance to the house is by a stone archway, which gives access to a passage. All will be in darkness, but you will pass in, and grope your way along for about a dozen yards. A voice will then ask, 'Who goes there?' You will answer, *Liberty*. That is the password. The owner of the voice will then grasp your hand and lead you down some stone steps along another passage, and give you admission to a subterranean vault where the meeting is to be held. These are the instructions for your guidance. Do not forget them. And now go to sleep again, for it will soon be time to commence work."

As Cohen uttered these words the crouching figure at the door rose to its feet, and sped away as silently as it had come. Then all unconscious that he had been watched, and his words heard, the Jew went back to his room, and Joseph got into bed again, but not to sleep. He was too excited for that, for he felt now that he was to become an actor in a

ghastly tragedy, and that his own life would in all probability be sacrificed. It was not a pleasant reflection even for an enthusiast. At any rate, not for a man upon whom the years still pressed lightly.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SILENT ONE.

THE next day Joseph went about his work in a dreary sort of way, as though his thoughts were elsewhere, as in truth they were.

No man, much less a young one practically inexperienced in the ways of the world, can face a coming great event in his life, an event which he knows is full of deadly peril, without some feeling of trepidation. It is true that in Joseph's case there had come a certain amount of callousness through his double disappointment, and he looked upon life, or at any rate thought so, with some indifference ; but, nevertheless, he could not help inveighing against the harsh Fate that had drifted him into his present position.

During the day Rebecca learned from her father that there was to be an important secret meeting that night, at which Joseph was to attend. She heard this with pain and sorrow, and late in the afternoon she contrived to have an interview with Joseph.

"I hear," she said, with ill-concealed agitation, "that we are on the eve of some terrible events, and that you are to play a part in them ?"

He could not help being struck by her kindly and anxious manner, and the tenderness that was wanted to melt away his callousness was supplied in her tone. He looked at her with almost tearful eyes as he answered—

"Yes, and possibly for me it means that my death-warrant will be signed."

She visibly shuddered, and a look of alarm came over her face, as she answered with emotion—

"This is dreadful. Why have you mixed yourself up with these affairs?"

He shrugged his shoulders, trying to look and to feel indifferent, but he was conscious that his trial was a failure.

"What does it matter?" he exclaimed, with a cynical sneer.

"Matter! It matters a great deal. You are a young man. Life lies before you, and you should not peril that life by interfering in affairs in which you have no personal interest."

He turned away for an instant to hide the sorrowful expression of his countenance, and then he exclaimed quickly and in an agitated manner—

"Rebecca, I have been driven into this. It is better to die like a man even in the morning of one's life, than to live as a dog, merely to fetch and carry for other men's pleasure."

"You have had a disappointment," she said reprovingly, "but what of that? Your disappointment is nothing compared to mine. But I want to live—to live to be revenged."

A sudden impulse that he could not resist caused him to quickly seize her hand, and exclaim passionately—

"Rebecca, what is your disappointment? Why do you not tell me? For your sake I would go to the ends of the earth. If you have been wronged I would revenge you, or perish in the attempt, for I love you, and do what I will I cannot conceal my love. This playing at brother and sister is a mere farce."

She was touched to the heart's core, tears rolled down her cheeks, and in a voice that was half-choked, she returned—

"You must not talk to me of love, for I can be nothing to you. I have told you that over and over again. Why, then, do you pain me by so repeatedly confessing your love?"

"But *you* love *me*," he cried.

She struggled with herself, and, averting her face, said—

"Yes, as a sister may love a brother, but that is all."

He let go the hold of her hand and sighed and murmured—

"I appreciate that, but it doesn't satisfy me."

Rebecca seemed much distressed. She would have liked to say something else, but it was obvious her feelings had overcome her. She grasped his hand and shook it warmly, and said with emotion—

"Take care of yourself, and run no risks that you can possibly avoid. Remember, you are to be my avenger. You see in me a wronged woman. You shall exact retribution for these wrongs."

"Will you not tell me what it is that has shadowed your life?" he cried with great energy.

"No, not now," she returned, decisively.

"Why?"

"For various reasons that I beg of you not to seek to know. Have patience. Some day, perhaps, I will tell you all. At present I must be silent."

She gave him no opportunity for further conversation, as she went away, leaving him alone with his thoughts, which were bitter enough. He felt thoroughly dejected, thoroughly hopeless, and exceedingly reckless. It was certain that Rebecca had made a very deep impression upon him, and her statement that she could not return the feeling only served to increase his cynicism, and cause him to take a more gloomy view of life.

"To-night will decide my fate," he sighed to himself, as he remembered that he was to attend the secret meeting. But little did he dream of the fate that was in store for him.

In Solomon Cohen's service was a Russian by the name of Alexander Kalnoky. He had been with Cohen for about two years, and occupied the position of an accountant. He lived upon the premises, and was to some extent in Cohen's

confidence, but only so far as the business was concerned. Cohen himself had considerable faith in Kalnoky, and liked him. Consequently, he gave him a good deal of liberty, and accorded him privileges which he did not allow to other employés in his service. Kalnoky was distinguished by peculiar taciturnity, so that he had come to be nicknamed by the rest of the workpeople as "The Silent One." He came from some province in Northern Russia, but nothing was known about his antecedents. Cohen had engaged him on the strength of excellent testimonials that he presented ; and he had proved himself to be a thorough accountant, and apparently took great interest in his master's business. But of his own affairs he never spoke ; and, in fact, was so reserved that he had very little to say to any one in the place. Personally he was an attractive man, being good-looking and well-shaped. He was dark as a raven, with small, glittering eyes, and hair as black as jet. He impressed one, and it was impossible to help the impression, that he was a man of great depth—in short, a crafty man. There was one thing that even the most casual observer could not have failed to notice, and that was, that very little escaped his observation. He might be silent, but at any rate he did not go through life half asleep. In fact, he seemed to know everything that was going on in connection with the business. It was generally supposed, except by those who knew better, that he was an utterly unimpressionable man—a sort of human statue, in short, with little insensibility, and no nerves. But this was hardly correct, seeing that he had made love to his master's daughter, Rebecca.

For some time he had shown her great attention, and never lost an opportunity of talking with her. During this time he proved that he could be agreeable when he liked, even to fascination. He did most certainly make an impression on Rebecca, and she thoughtlessly indulged in a little mild flirtation with him. She meant no harm. She enjoyed his society somewhat, and guilelessly and foolishly

allowed him to pay her some attention, though she looked upon this as nothing more than the homage a well-conducted man should show to any pretty woman. It was an illusion, and she was somewhat rudely disillusionized. For one day, in burning, passionate language, and with an eloquence she never deemed him capable of, he made love to her.

At first she was amazed, then annoyed, and finally alarmed when she saw the mischief she had unintentionally done. She told him that she could not reciprocate his feeling, and that to become his wife was impossible.

He seemed utterly unprepared for this, and, as he himself put it, he was "stunned." He did not abandon hope without a struggle. He urged his suit persistently, until her manner, her language, and her determination convinced him that it was useless. From the moment that he recognized this he seemed to accept his fate with resignation, and he never referred to the subject again, but it was very obvious to Rebecca that his disappointment had soured him, and that he brooded over it.

Rebecca did not tell her father of this little incident. She did not think it was necessary to do so. He was much absorbed in his business. His hands and head were full of things, and she seldom troubled him with anything that had no direct bearing on his business or his schemes. Therefore, Solomon remained in ignorance that the man in whom he reposed so much trust had made love to his daughter. Rebecca herself soon came to laugh at the incident, and she believed that Kalnoky thought no more about it; for though he had undoubtedly become a little more reserved, he devoted himself to his work, and gave no outward sign that he was in any way affected. But herein she was utterly at fault, and was entirely incapable of estimating the man's character. She thought that he was smitten with a mere passing fancy for her, whereas it had been a great absorbing passion with him, and his failure had changed him.

Joseph Courrette knew nothing whatever about Kalnoky

having made love to Rebecca, nor did he know much about Kalnoky at all, as he came very little in contact with him. His amazement may therefore be judged when on that particular afternoon of the day on which he was to attend the secret meeting, Kalnoky approached him and said—

"I want to have some conversation with you alone."

"With me?" exclaimed Courrette in astonishment.

"Yes."

"What is it about?" asked Joseph, as he eyed the other somewhat suspiciously.

"Walk with me for half-an hour and I will tell you."

The two went out together, and in a few moments Kalnoky said abruptly—

"You have been making love to Rebecca Cohen?"

Joseph was so taken aback and so profoundly astonished by this unexpected remark, that for a moment or two he could make no answer, but stopped and stared at his companion's face. Then it flashed upon him why the question had been asked. This man was a rival, so he answered his question by asking another.

"Have you ever made love to her yourself?"

"That is no reply to what I demand to know," said Kalnoky, with suppressed anger, that left no doubt on Courrette's mind that he was confronting a rival.

"Demand!" echoed Joseph, elevating his eyebrows.

"Yes, I demand to know. But don't mistake me. I am not wishing to quarrel with you. I know that you have been making love to the girl, and what I wish you to tell me is, has she encouraged you in the slightest way?"

"I see it all," thought Joseph to himself, "there is some connection between this man and Rebecca, and that is the reason she rejects me."

This thought, apart from its being entirely erroneous, was an unfortunate one, because it caused hatred and bitterness where there should have been neither, and it caused

Joseph to make an enemy of the man, when he might have turned him into a friend.

"Well, I can tell you one thing," he retorted, with a sneer, "she doesn't hate me."

This ambiguous expression aroused the ire of Kalnoky, whose dark eyes blazed up with the fire of jealousy, for to a mind already inflamed it seemed to convey the notion that she was favouring the suit of Courrette.

Kalnoky displayed excitement that was altogether unusual with him. He bit his lips, and clenched his hands with passion, and he hissed these words into his rival's face—

"I should like to kill you."

With such energy and fierceness was this uttered that Courrette was startled and drew back.

"Why should you like to kill me?" he asked.

"I should like to kill you because you stand in my way. I love this woman, and I believe she would have accepted me if you had not appeared upon the scene."

The confession, as may be imagined, did not tend to appease Courrette, who, knowing now that he was confronting a rival, grew furiously jealous. Neither man was in a frame of mind to reason sensibly; had he been so, and had he compared notes with the other, both would have seen that neither had grounds for jealousy, since Rebecca had rejected them both. But when two men come to look upon each other as rivals in the affections of the same woman they do not stop to reason. Hatred blinds them to common sense, and they no longer regard life as a sacred thing.

"You love her," Joseph said, with a bitter sneer, "you love her indeed! She would surely be in sore straits to accept the love of a man like you."

This unjustifiable and uncalled-for remark stung Kalnoky to the quick as it was well calculated to do, and with a sudden impulse of frenzied passion he seized Courrette by the throat, but Courrette, who was by far the more powerful man of the two, shook himself free, and then with

a sweep of his arms he hurled his antagonist against a wall.

This little scene had taken place in an almost deserted street, but one or two people noticed the struggle and hurried forward to ascertain what it was about. Not wishing to run the risk of having his own or his master's affairs exposed Courrette wisely walked away. Kalnoky, who was bruised, breathless, and white with passion, paid no heed to the inquiries that were addressed to him by the lookers-on, but straightening himself up he hurried after Courrette, and overtaking him, he said with subdued energy, that did not, however, disguise the fierce passion that moved him—

"Mark this, Joseph Courrette, this afternoon's work shall cost you dear."

Joseph, who was excited, and had lost control of himself, exclaimed—

"Do not threaten me, or by heaven, I'll crush you to the ground."

"I am not a street rowdy," answered the other, "and I decline to make a spectacle of myself here, but you shall pay heavily and dearly for the insult you have put upon me. I have you in my power, and before I have done with you agony shall wring sweat-drops of blood from you."

He strode away, and Courrette was left standing there in amazement and alarm, for the threat he had heard seemed to him to be something more than mere words. There was something ominous in the expression—"I have you in my power." Unless this was idly uttered it was pregnant with a great meaning. At any rate such was the first impression Joseph received, as he pondered upon what had passed. But then he began to reason with himself, and as he reasoned he was enabled to take a less serious view of his rival's covert threat.

"His words were words of passion, and meant nothing," said Joseph to himself. "What harm could *he* do me? What can he possibly know about me?"

He put the matter from him with this reflection, or rather tried to do so, but still he did not feel quite easy, and his mind constantly reverted to the subject ; and when, an hour later, he met Rebecca, he yielded to a sudden impulse, and asked—

“Do you know much of Alexander Kalnoky ?”

Rebecca grew very pale, and she exclaimed in a quick, sharp tone—

“Why do you ask that question ?”

“I have a reason. Can you not answer me ?”

She reflected for some moments, then said—

“I have no reason to conceal what I know. Kalnoky once made love to me, and I rejected him.”

“I know that.”

“How do you know it ?”

“Because he told me.”

Joseph then related all that had passed between him and Kalnoky, and he asked Rebecca if she attached any importance to Kalnoky's threat ?

“No,” she answered decidedly. “It was the threat of a jealous man. I am convinced that he knows nothing about us, and unless he means to do you personal violence, you may treat this threat with contempt.”

Joseph felt somewhat reassured after this, and yet he could not altogether shake off an uneasy feeling that possessed him. He did not, however, mention that fact to Rebecca, not wishing to alarm her unnecessarily ; but he resolved to himself that there was danger in Kalnoky, and that he must be closely watched. What he meant by this was that Kalnoky either suspected Cohen of being in league with the Nihilists, or had absolute knowledge of something. In either case Joseph could not be indifferent to the fact that it was necessary to be exceedingly cautious, and he decided that he would take an early opportunity to mention his suspicions to Cohen and put him on his guard.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SECRET MEETING.

THE clocks had just struck half-past eleven when, muffled in a huge fur cloak, Joseph descended from his room to attend the secret meeting. Before leaving the house he went to Cohen's room. He glanced round expecting to see Rebecca, and was much disappointed to find that she was not there. Cohen himself was seated in his great chair drawn up against the stove, and was enjoying his nightly pipe. He turned round as Joseph entered, and exclaimed—

"Ah, you are ready. Well, the God of Abraham protect you. I know you'll do your duty. To-night will decide events that, if they come to pass, will startle the world."

"Rebecca is not here," remarked Joseph, thinking more of her than of the old man's words.

"No, I believe she has gone to bed. Did you want her?"

"Well, no, only to say good-night," said Joseph carelessly, though at heart he was greatly disappointed.

A few minutes later he was making his way down the stone stairs that led to the lower passage by which the street was reached. He had struck a match to see his way, and as he reached the bottom of the stairs he was startled and surprised to behold a female. It was Rebecca muffled in a large cloak.

"What are you doing here, Rebecca?" he exclaimed in glad surprise.

seemed to be shivering and pinched up with the cold. She made no other sign beyond the sneeze, but began to move forward with a tottering and uncertain gait as if she was weak and ill. Joseph allowed her to get ahead some distance, then he followed her. She led the way along the quietest streets, avoiding as much as possible the broad thoroughfares, where many sleighs were gliding along and passers-by were numerous. Joseph naturally wondered who this creature was ; she was not what she seemed to be, that he knew full well, for the Nihilists were far too cautious to employ a mere outcast on such a dangerous mission. She was somebody of importance, somebody in whom the most implicit trust was placed ; and it was even probable that she might be some high-born and delicately-cultured lady, for the conspirators found their tools amongst the very highest people of the land. The army, the navy, the civil service, the law, the police, the Church, even the Court itself furnished a quota to the great band of plotters, and nothing could testify more surely to the bitter discontent that permeates all classes of society in so-called "Holy Russia." A discontent that springs from barbarous laws, from corrupt justice, from the absence of freedom, from an accursed system of espionage as bad as that which characterized the Spanish Inquisition in its worst days. The Russian people groaned under a crushing yoke of despotism, and an attempt was being made to throw this yoke off. Whether the means taken were the right ones or not might be open to question ; but some justification might be found for them in a land where there was no liberty of action and scarcely freedom of thought. Desperate diseases require desperate remedies, and men, knowing that they could not claim a hearing for their grievances, as they could have done in countries less despotically governed, resorted to terrible and secret means to gain their ends.

Joseph continued to follow his guide for some distance. She never looked back to see if he was coming, but she

proceeded on her course in an apparently aimless way. At length she stopped for a brief instant before a block of buildings on the quay, and she raised an arm as if for a signal. Then suddenly she disappeared in the shadow of the buildings, and was lost to sight.

Remembering Cohen's instructions, Joseph proceeded to the spot where the woman had stopped. The quay was deserted. Not a living thing was in sight. It was past midnight, and all was silent as the grave, save for the whistling wind and the gurgle of the water against the wooden piles. The stone archway Cohen had spoken of was there, and Joseph passed under it. The darkness was intense. There was not a sound. He groped his way along, feeling the wall to guide him, and when he had gone some yards he was startled by a voice close to his ear, demanding—"Who goes there?" For a moment he forgot the answer he was to make, but only for a moment; then he said, "Liberty." Instantly he felt his hand grasped, and thus led by his unseen and unknown guide he descended a flight of stone steps; next he went along a dark, ill-smelling passage, until suddenly the guide stopped and whispered the single word, "*Wait.*" In two or three minutes a door was thrown open and revealed a vaulted chamber that was lighted by a horn lantern containing a candle. Joseph passed in with his guide, and the door was closed. At the end of the chamber was another door. This the guide opened and motioned Joseph to enter, and he found himself in a large cellar with a vaulted roof, from which the wet oozed, while the walls were shiny and the floor was the natural earth. A single lamp from the roof did little more than make the darkness visible. The place was filled with men, but Joseph could not see their faces owing to the want of a sufficient light. The man who had led him in took him to a seat in the middle of the place, where he was isolated and conspicuous. Then somebody evidently in authority said—

"Joseph Courrette, you are one of us. You come with

good recommendations, and we know that you are to be trusted. Therefore you have been admitted here to-night. You are aware that we represent a vast and secret organization, having for its object the freeing of this distracted country from the yoke of despotism. We have clamoured for reforms, but our cries have been allowed to pass unheeded, and so the time has come when we are determined to strike such a blow as shall bring about that which we demand. Opposed to us is a tremendous power, and our only chance of coping with it is by the secret machinery which we have set up and perfected. Openly, we should have no chance against the organized and drilled forces of our foes, but secretly we are enabled to pit ourselves against them. To-night we have assembled here to make the final arrangement for a great drama that will be full of tragic element. In that drama you will be called upon to play a part. But let me ask you if you are fully aware of the penalty attaching to those of our order who may turn traitors ? ”

“ Yes, I am, ” Joseph answered in a low tone.

“ What is it ? Give it a name. ”

“ Death, ” said Joseph, solemnly.

“ That is so, ” the leader continued. “ Traitors cannot escape our vengeance. They are pursued to the farthest ends of the earth, and no country can shield them from the punishment we mete out. Sooner or latter they fall. I have made these remarks to still more deeply impress you with a sense of the desperate work we have in hand. Desperate in a double sense, for those who engage in it carry their lives in their hands, but if they fall they are crowned with the martyr's crown, for they die in the great cause of trying to regenerate their country. And now you shall know the business we have in hand and the part you are to take in it. ”

CHAPTER XXII.

NICHOLAS STROVELLE.

THE President of the meeting here called over a roll of names, and as each man was named he stepped out from the main body and stood in the centre of the room beside Joseph, who was told to rise up from the stool on which he had hitherto been seated. Including Joseph, twelve men were ranged in front of the President, who, when he had run his eye over them, said with impressive solemnity—"Brethren, you have all been chosen by ballot to carry out an order of our body in Grand Council assembled, and you shall now hear what that order is. The Czar of all the Russias has been condemned to death and you are to be his executioners."

At this announcement there was considerable sensation, notwithstanding that it was generally known amongst the Nihilists that the Czar was to be assassinated. Joseph's heart beat faster, and his face paled, not from fear, however, but from suppressed excitement and a feeling of powerful emotion, for he would have been a fool indeed if he had not realized the awful nature of the deed contemplated, and the almost certain death of all those who were to take part in it.

There was a pause. A solemn, impressive pause, and then the President spoke again.

"Brethren," he continued, "the seriousness of the task we have set ourselves cannot be overrated, but we must not

shrink from it on that account. We are aiming at high and ennobling principles, and to attain them we must stick at no means, however desperate. Despots must die. The Czar is a despot, and therefore he is doomed. By his death we hope to strike terror into the hearts of those who live by grinding the bodies and souls of the people. The Augean stable of corruption which defiles our unhappy country must be cleared out. And when that is done, and not till then, shall a new era dawn for us. Then, and not till then, shall liberty begin. Then shall sound the clarion of joy, telling to the farthest ends of the earth that a great nation has burst its shackles; that a down-trodden people have risen; that millions who have hitherto groaned in misery, scarcely able to call their souls their own, are slaves no longer. This, brethren, is our mission. It is a grand one, and what man will not feel proud though he knows that he dies to-morrow, at the thought that he has had a hand in bringing about this happy state of things."

The orator had waxed warm and enthusiastic, and the meeting, catching some of his enthusiasm, gave utterance to expressions of approval. These men, however mistaken they might be in their views, or, at any rate, in the means they took to give expression to those views, were earnest, if desperate. They at least believed what they preached, and that they had the courage of their opinions was proved in their readiness to peril their lives in order to carry out what they believed to be their mission.

In Joseph Courrette's case the circumstances were somewhat different. If he had not been thoroughly indoctrinated with the Socialistic creed, he was still not without some sympathy for the cause. But it may be doubted if he would have entered into it if a blight had not fallen upon his life. For it is not too much to say that to a man of his peculiar sensitiveness, his disappointments were a blight. His failure to attain his desires had begotten in him a dangerous restlessness, a restlessness that pushed him to the

verge of indifference to his future ; and yet though he believed that he set no store on life, it may be doubted if this was not a delusion. For a young man endowed with energy, strength, and a fair amount of ability, can hardly come to regard life lightly unless he happens for the time being to be brought into that mental condition when he is incapable of either realizing the responsibilities which life entails, or the true enjoyment that can be extracted from it by those who know how to seek it. The charitable view taken of suicide is that the unhappy beings are mentally deranged when they commit self-slaughter. It would hardly be stretching a point too far to urge that men who labour under keen disappointment and in consequence become indifferent to their existence, are hardly more sane than the poor creatures who, shrinking from the cares of the world, recklessly hurl themselves into the dark and all-abiding shadows of death.

Joseph had become gloomy and even morbid by reason of his unrealized hopes. His second disappointment in regard to Rebecca Cohen had accentuated his dissatisfaction with everything around him. He might, in the course of time, have come, if not to forget, at least to look with indifference upon the incidents of his career in which Bertha Schmidt had figured. But this new blow to his pride and his hopes had been too much for him. And though his heart might not be in the work he had entered into, desperateness blinded him for a time, and therefore he was a ready and pliable tool in the hands of those self-constituted regenerators of society. He had embarked on a course from which there was no turning back, while to go on was almost certain to involve him in a shameful death. And yet he did not shrink, but he felt weighted down with a sense of supreme unhappiness, and he was steeped in the bitterness of black despair.

After the announcement the President had made he waited for several moments, as if he expected some comments or reply, but none were made. Then he asked pointedly—

"Have any of you objections to urge why you should not be called upon to undertake the desperate duty imposed upon you?"

All remained silent.

The dramatic elements of the scene were most impressive. There was something that approached to horror about it, for was it not the prelude to a great tragedy that might startle the whole of the civilized world? These men, who had assembled there in that dark vault, represented a potent power that was capable of hurling emperors into eternity, and of shattering into ruins the fabric of ordered society.

Presently the President spoke again. His tone was more deliberate, his words more solemn—

"I am moved to tears by your devotion," he said, "for this deed that you are called upon to do is filled with deadly peril to yourselves, for it is hardly possible that you can all come out of it scathless. But you are children of your country, and for her grand cause you are willing to lay down your lives."

He ceased speaking, overcome by his emotion, and then there stepped forward from the ranks of the men in front of him a little dark-complexioned, fierce, determined-looking man about fifty years of age, who, raising up his hand as if to command silence and attention, exclaimed in a deep bass voice—

"Why should the lives of all these men be risked at once? The Emperor has been doomed. Good. Let his doom be carried out. I hate him as I hate all Emperors and Kings and Queens. They are the curse of the world. They are the makers of wars, the shedders of blood, and to keep them propped up in their luxurious vice the poor are ground in the dust. The hearts of the masses are torn out that the great ones of the earth may fatten and batten. It is for us to shatter into the dust this rotten and corrupt fabric of society. It is for us and those who hold our views to revolutionize the world, and to take from the selfish and

greedy few their great and ill-gotten hoards, and distribute them equally amongst the many."

This fustian, uttered in an excited and sonorous tone, found an echo in the hearts of all present, as evidenced by the suppressed murmurs of applause that greeted the speech. The little man paused and mopped his face, and then he went on in the same voluble strain—

"The business we have in hand is a perilous one, I admit. But one or two resolute men can carry it out. Why, therefore, should many be jeopardized? Will any man join me? If so, he and I will do the deed alone."

Before any one else could speak Joseph Courrette stepped forward, and said boldly—

"I will."

There was a low, subdued murmur of applause, and when it had subsided the President said—

"You are two brave men. You, Courrette, are young and comparatively untried, but you promise well. You, Strovelle, are a veteran in our service, and for upwards of a quarter of a century you have proved your devotion to our cause, and we shall never forget the service you rendered to that cause abroad years ago. On you two then shall fall the onus of this task, and your names shall be engraved amongst our list of heroes, if this meeting approves."

A murmur of assent ran through the assembly, and the President continued—

"It shall be so, then. You, Joseph Courrette, and you, Nicholas Strovelle, shall carry out the order of the Council. Your hands shall do the actual deed. The others named shall render every assistance in their power."

Strovelle turned to Joseph, and grasping his hand exclaimed—

"Hail, comrade! we gain glory or go to death together."

The details of the crime were next settled, and a well-executed plan was handed to Strovelle, on which was marked the line of route which the Emperor was to take on a certain


day on his journey to a celebrated church.¹ On one part of the plan were some black dotted lines showing the position of a square through which the Emperor would pass. A red spot marked the place where the assassin was to stand in order to throw an explosive bomb so that it would reach the Emperor's carriage. So minutely had all the details been worked out that two points were indicated by dots. The space from dot to dot represented a distance of about twenty yards. A person standing on the red spot, and facing the dots, would form the apex of a triangle, the space between the dots being the base. When the carriage reached midway between the points the bomb was to be thrown, when according to the calculation, it would fall directly into the carriage. From the red spot red lines were drawn, diverging to different angles. These marked ways of retreat for the assassin. The one that he took would be determined by circumstances. At various places named other men were to be posted, their duty being to aid and abet the assassin's escape so far as they possibly could.

Strovelle glanced over the plan and smiled grimly. Then he carefully folded it and put it into his pocket. Certain other matters having been discussed and settled, the meeting came to a close, but before the members separated every caution was observed to make sure that there were no spies outside, and that the coast was clear. That being determined, one by one the men slipped out, and glided away into the darkness.

Taking Courrette's arm, Strovelle said, when they got into the street—

"Come with me. I should like to have a talk with you."

¹ This project for the assassination of the unfortunate Czar was one of many that were arranged by the Nihilists. The meeting described above is not imaginary, but actually took place. The "plan" alluded to was the work of a young Russian draughtsman, who subsequently died in Geneva. All the details were accurately worked out, and the distance and the range to be covered by the fall of the bomb were scientifically calculated.—*The Author.*



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ROPE OR SIBERIA.

NICHOLAS STROVELLE and Joseph Courrette, as soon as they got outside, muffled their throats up, pressed their fur caps down over their brows, and plunged their fur-gloved hands into the deep pockets of their heavy coats, for the temperature was Arctic in its iciness, and the wind that blew from down the frozen river rasped the exposed flesh like a saw. The streets seemed to be steeped in the silence of death. The lamplights flared into long, blue hissing flames. Overhead the stars—

“ In solemn silence and in frosty splendour burned.”

Nothing living save these two men appeared to be in sight. Yes, there was something else. No, it must have been a shadow, for it moved like a shadow, it was silent as a shadow, it disappeared like a shadow. And yet one could almost have sworn that it was not a shadow, but a man, for when Nicholas and Joseph left it came out of a dark archway—and shadows don't do that. It was an archway right opposite that which gave entrance to the place of secret meeting. When the two men, who were pledged to assassinate the Czar of Russia, left the rendezvous, the spectre or man, whichever it was, glided, or seemed to glide, from under the archway; and always keeping in the shadows itself, it followed them.

The church clocks chimed three. It was a ghostly and

witching hour. It was the so-called **dead of night**, and as the companions with **bowed heads** forged with difficulty **against that heart-chilling wind** they little dreamed that **ought followed them**, either in the shape of shadow or man. Presently they struck into a street where they were more sheltered from the icy wind, and were able to breathe freer.

Then, turning suddenly to his colleague, Strovelle asked with strange abruptness—

“Joseph Courrette, who are you, and where do you come from?”

Joseph knew that this question was not asked impertinently, so he answered at once—

“I come from Zurich, in Switzerland, and I am——” A pause, then—“I am nobody.”

“You will be nobody, or rather a rotting body, soon, for, though we slay the Czar, we ourselves are certain to be slain,” whispered Strovelle, with a grim chuckle.

Joseph sighed, and as his companion heard that sigh he exclaimed—

“Ah, that tells me that your heart is not as mine is—turned into stone.”

“Pooh!” cried Joseph, with a sneer. “And if it isn’t I am no less indifferent to my life than you seem to be.”

“Courrette, man,” said the other, “you are young, and the young life has many joys. But you are like glass, I see into you and can read you. Your heart has been gripped as mine has—by a woman, and crushed, but you haven’t a shadow on your soul as I have.”

“How do you know that?” asked Joseph as he fairly started with surprise at the accurate guess.

“How do I know it! Do I not tell you that you are glass and I can read you. But we shall be friends, that is as long as we live,” he added grimly. “And perhaps after! Who knows! Those who preach hell, forget to tell you that hell is in this life. I have gone through hell already. I shall never know any other. I have that on my con-

science and my soul that has caused me the torture of the damned."

These strange words induced Joseph to stare with astonishment at the speaker, who, he began to suspect now, was not in his right mind. Strovelle evidently divined his thoughts, for he said, with a little, low mocking laugh—

"You think I'm mad, friend. Well, perhaps I am, because I think that I am not; and I have heard say that no mad person believes he is mad. But I am not mad here," touching his head, "but here," as he struck his breast over his heart. "My head is clear enough," he went on. "You and I have been to a meeting. I have a plan in my pocket. You and I are linked together by a common cause. We are to perform a deed that will startle the world. A deed that shall cause our names to be known in every civilized country of the world. A deed that shall make us famous. Some people perhaps may choose to prefix *in* before the word. But men's motives are frequently mistaken. However, it will not concern us? We shall be dead. And the opinions of the living vex not the souls of the dead."

He seemed to take a morbid delight in harping upon his death, and though Joseph believed that he himself had reached that stage of recklessness when he was utterly indifferent about his life, he did not altogether like his companion's levity, and so he said—

"It is very likely, as you say, that our lives will be sacrificed, but still I don't think you need make a joke of it."


"Ah, ah," cried Strovelle, with a triumphant chuckle. "Your words betray you. You cling to life. Your heart hasn't been petrified as mine has. Would you like to hear my story? Don't be alarmed, man. I won't bore you. It isn't long. It's all told in one word—WOMAN!"

Joseph began to feel more interested. His sympathies were aroused, and his own feelings were being brought more into accord with those of this strange man, and he said kindly—

"I am sorry for you. I suppose you have been jilted?"

"Jilted!" cried the other, bitterly. "God in Heaven, is that the word to use? Well, yes, you are right. The world calls it jilted. But I call it being plunged into the deepest depths of a living hell. Look at me. I am not imposing in figure. I haven't a massive head. And some would-be witty people would say I am only the ninth part of a man, for I am a tailor by trade. But the trade does not make the man. I had a big heart. I had brains enough too. But I dreamed dreams. I imagined that one man was as good as another. Fools have thought this before, and paid the penalty as I have done. I worked for a big firm. It's years and years ago. The partners were as rich as the Rothschilds. One of them had a daughter. I fell in love with her. She encouraged me. She vowed she would be true to me. Then soon her people found it out. I was kicked away as if I had been a mangy cur, and soon after she married some one else. Then I went to Switzerland. What I did there, what I have done since, matters not. There you are. There's my story. But, Lord God, how that disappointment changed me. How I hate everything and everybody now. The world calls that cynicism. I was spurned because I was poor and friendless. Yet I have a body like other men, a brain like other men, a heart like other men, and a soul like other men, if men have souls. But I was treated like a dog, spurned like a leper, and now I am at war against the world. Of course the world will conquer, but what does it matter? Life has no charm for me. I couldn't be content to drone on as a crushed fool. I want excitement. A reckless life, a sudden death, and then—what? Bah, who knows, who cares? I don't. This world can offer me no peace, no happiness. I am tortured; I want Lethe. Death will bring it."

Joseph was astonished not only by the man's reckless, non-chalance manner, but by the strange likeness his story bore to his own. Seizing his hand he shook it warmly, and said—



"I sympathize with you, sympathize with you out of the very depths of my being. I could tell you something very similar. But you are good at guessing, and you may guess it. I echo your words—'A reckless life, a sudden death.' Life should be sweet to be enjoyable. When it becomes sour it is no longer worth having, and should be flung away."

"Poor lad, poor lad," sighed Strovellé, as he returned the warm grip of the hand, and showing by his manner that he wasn't quite as devoid of feeling as he tried to make believe. "You are young. I am twice your age. I have sucked the orange dry. For you it may still hold some juice. The iron hasn't entered your soul as deeply as it has done mine. Why not live?"

"You are a strange being," answered Joseph, "but you cannot tell how deep the iron has gone into me."

"Have you no friends?" asked the other with the abruptness that seemed peculiar to him.

"No. Well, few that I care about."

"Have you no brothers or sisters?"

"No."

"Mother or father?"

"Yes, both."

"Ah," sighed Strovellé. "They are sheet-anchors to a man. When they go the truest friends the world can give a man go from him. Think of them, and live for them. Leave such desperate deeds as the killing of Emperors to men like myself who have no kindred to mourn them; to men who hate life, and do not fear death."

Joseph was moved as he hadn't been moved for a very long time by these words, and his thoughts flew to his mother and father, and his conscience smote him for the way he had neglected them.

"I ought to have written to them; I ought to have cheered them," he thought. "But now it is too late, too late."

"No," he said hoarsely, and with set teeth. "You do not know me. I am as reckless as yourself—as fearless as yourself. The past is gone. Of the future but little remains for us. We'll live it together, and die together."

"And drink together," the other put in with mock gravity, for, in spite of his cynicism, he had an unconscious vein of humour in him.

They had reached a trackteer or inn, common to all the towns of Russia, and which are allowed to keep open all night. They are equivalent to the English coffee-house.

"Come, let us go in here," Strovelle said. "I know the man who keeps this place. He is a worthy, honest soul. He would be one of us if he dare, but he has not the courage. We will get warmed. We will fill our bellies, have some sleep, and then discuss our plans."

Joseph was nothing loath, and so they pushed open the double doors—doubled to keep out the intense cold—and entered the great room of the inn, with its sanded floor, its rough benches and tables, and its stupendous stove, with its great snake-like coil of piping, used to increase the draught and give off more heat. The atmosphere of this room, compared to the Arctic atmosphere outside, was like a furnace, and the two men threw off their heavy coats, and having made themselves comfortable, they ordered a bowl of lemoned tea,¹ some liver sausage and black bread, and a dish of hot salted cabbage.² When they had discussed these things, they had the tea-bowl replenished, and ordered a bundle of the long black cigars, through which a straw runs, and which are not only common to Russia, but to all the Continent. They are very strong, and very cheap, and,

¹ Tea is largely drunk all over Russia by all classes. It is served up scalding hot in large bowls, with slices of lemon floating in it, and is consumed usually without either sugar or milk. It is ladled out of the bowl into a glass like punch.—*The Author*.

² Another Russian dish. The cabbage is steeped in salt, and then soaked with vinegar. It is a favourite dish amongst the poorer classes.—*The Author*

probably on that account, are much appreciated by the common people. Three or four other persons were in the room, but they were lying on the benches asleep. Houses of this kind are much used by homeless outcasts, who by spending a few copecks, can thus obtain shelter and warmth.

The room was large, and Strovelle and his companion were at one end, and far removed from the others, and so their conversation was not likely to be overheard, and when the greasy waiter saw that it was improbable there would be any more orders for a time, he betook himself to his corner by the great stove, and was soon snoring. For a while Strovelle smoked his cigar in silence, and Joseph was too much occupied with his thoughts to talk just then. But after a time Strovelle, resting his elbows on the table, inclined his head until his lips were very close to the ear of his companion, and said—

“This deed that we are to do requires nerve, steadiness, and tact. There must be no failure. It is almost certain that we shall perish whether we succeed or not. But it is possible—mind you I only say possible—that we may escape in the confusion that will ensue on the explosion of the bombs. If we do, and can only get out of the country, our capture will be exceeding difficult—so difficult that it may never be effected.”

“You would not disdain, then, to escape if you can?” Joseph remarked, feeling that his companion was somewhat inconsistent.

“No, why should I? If the chance offers I shall not let it slip. But I give you my word that I shall make no great effort to go. In fact, we may say that we are engaged on the forlornest of forlorn hopes, and though we may accomplish our mission our own lives can only be preserved by something little short of a miracle.”

These words set Courrette pondering. Thoughts came into his head that he had not thought before, and for the time the clouds that had, so to speak, dazed his intellect

cleared away, and he mentally asked why he should lend himself to so awful a deed as the assassination of the Czar of Russia. He himself had no quarrel with Russia, and no personal feeling against her supreme ruler, and he further asked himself if the Czar's death, instead of bringing about a better state of government, would not plunge the already unhappy country into anarchy and greater misery?

It will thus be seen that Joseph Courrette fluctuated between ennobling and debasing ideas. Could he have shaken himself free from the despondency and recklessness his disappointments had begotten, he might have carved out a path for himself which, if not exactly leading to fame, would have won him the honour of men and a bright and peaceful life. For he had that within him which raised him above the common herd, and he was capable of developing mental qualities which would assuredly have secured him high place as an honourable citizen in any community in which he might have chosen to cast his lot.

These views passed in rapid survey through his mind, and then came gloom again as he recognized how deeply he was committed, and that if he betrayed any signs of wavering he would to a certainty fall a victim to the pitiless revenge of the Nihilists, who tolerated no traitors in their camp. Notwithstanding this, however, so attached did he feel to the strange man at his side, although his acquaintance with him was not half-a-dozen hours old, that in cautious and guarded language he expressed to him some of the sentiments that stirred him.

Strovelle listened patiently and attentively, and when the other had finished he said quietly—

"I told you I could read you. And I have already said that to do a deed such as we are pledged to do a man must be either a fanatic or a confirmed and reckless cynic. You are neither. I see that. I certainly am the latter, and perhaps a little of the former. But, Joseph Courrette, I have yet some grains of humanity left, and if you wish to

live I will not be the one to drag you into the grave with me. Say the word and I will save you."

"How?" asked Joseph, growing a little excited.

"There are yet four days before the day fixed for the Czar's execution, as decreed by our Council," answered Strovelle. "If you repent I will do the deed myself, and put you in the way of leaving the country before the time. Say, how shall it be?"

Joseph struggled with his better self. His thoughts flew to his mother and father, who had done so much for him. Ought he not to make them some return? Ought he not to try and brighten their declining years? But the shadow fell upon him again as he remembered Bertha and Rebecca, and there crept into his heart once more the old recklessness, and turning to his companion he said firmly—

"It shall not be. I have committed myself, and will stand or fall with you."

Strovelle grasped his hand, and actually displayed emotion as he answered huskily—

"Good. You are brave. You are staunch. You are a worthy comrade. It's settled. And now let us have a sleep."

He stretched himself on the bench, and Joseph buried his face in his arms on the table.

Outside, silently and mysteriously twelve men collected, and at a noiseless sign from one who was evidently the leader they ranged themselves in single file, and from under his cloak each man drew a revolver and a short sword such as is carried in Continental countries by gendarmes. Then, all being ready, the leader made another sign, and pushed open the heavy door of the trackteer, and the men filed in. The leader glanced hurriedly round till his eyes rested on Strovelle and Courrette, and pointing to them he cried—

"Arrest them!"

Living in an atmosphere of danger, and consequently ever on the alert, Strovelle sprang up and called to Joseph. He

took in the situation in an instant, and tried to draw his revolver, but the gendarmes were too quick, and half-a-dozen brawny fellows threw themselves on him, while some of the others seized Joseph, who, however, offered not the slightest resistance. Strovellé, on the other hand, made a desperate effort to break away, displaying a strength that was marvellous considering his small, slight frame. But it was utterly useless. In a few moments the gendarmes had twisted a rope round and round his body, confining his arms as if they were in a vice.

"Good," he said, with a bitter smile. "I yield to force that I cannot resist. I am conquered, but not beaten. This means either the rope or Siberia. Which is it?"

No answer was made, but he was dragged forward and placed in the centre of the armed men, who still held their drawn swords in their hands. Joseph, who was pale, but defiant, was similarly bound, and placed beside his companion, and thus, roped as if they had been savage animals, and surrounded by men who would not have hesitated to cut them down if they had made any attempt to escape, they were marched out prisoners, and each knew too surely that he was going to his doom.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHICH WAS THE WINNER ?

As Rebecca Cohen went into the room to take her coffee on the morning of Joseph's arrest her first words to her father were—

"Has Joseph returned ?"

Solomon's face was anxious and thoughtful as he answered curtly—

"No, not yet."

The father and daughter were silent for some time, and took their coffee and ate their bread in an abstracted sort of way. Presently Rebecca asked—

"Don't you think he ought to have been back by this this ? It's nearly ten o'clock."

"Yes, I do."

"What has kept him, then ?" pursued Rebecca, catching inquietude from her father's manner.

"I don't know. One moment I am inclined to be anxious ; but the next, when I reason with myself, it doesn't seem to me that there is much to be anxious about. Something important has turned up, and he has been detained, no doubt."

Rebecca was not content with this answer, and she saw by his manner that her father had not satisfied himself either. He was troubled and showed it, and so she deemed it advisable to let the subject drop for the present. Soon after Solomon announced his intention of going out, saying

that he had some business in the town that would detain him up to midday.

Rebecca could not disguise from herself that she was uneasy on Joseph's account. She could not imagine any reason for his detention ; and moreover he was well aware how important it was for him to be at his duties at the usual hour in order that no suspicion might be aroused. That he was not there seemed to point very conclusively to something being wrong.

She busied herself for an hour or more in various little tasks, trying her best to distract her mind. But she did not succeed in her desires ; for her thoughts would wander in spite of her efforts to Joseph, and she laboured under a presentiment that something was wrong. What that something was she was afraid to try and shape. But her uneasiness certainly grew as the morning advanced and Joseph returned not.

Midday had nearly arrived when there was a knock on the door, and before she could give any response the handle turned, the door opened, and much to her amazement Alexander Kalnoky stood before her. She was amazed because he never by any possible chance came to this room, for it was Solomon's private apartment, and he did not care about any one entering it save his daughter. Instantly she associated Kalnoky's visit with Joseph's absence, and demanded angrily—

“ What has brought you here ? ”

Kalnoky's dark face was perhaps a trifle paler than usual ; but he displayed no excitement ; he had himself so perfectly under command that he gave no sign of what was passing in his mind.

“ Business,” was his curt, cool answer to her question.

“ This is not the place for transacting business,” she said warmly ; “ and, moreover, my father is out.”

“ I am aware of both things,” he returned, with the same self-possession.

She flashed an angry glance at him as she exclaimed—

"You seem to be aware of a good deal that doesn't concern you, and from your knowing my father's movements so well you must have been playing the spy."

"Yes, I have done that too."

She was provoked by his coolness and apparent non-chalance, so that turning upon him excitedly she remarked with a bitter sneer—

"You are mean enough for anything, even to play the part of a spy."

"If you like to put it in that way, and it pleases you, yes," he returned, while never a muscle of his face moved, and there wasn't the slightest indication that he was hurt. But after a slight pause he remarked in a tone that for the first time testified that he felt emotion, "How is it that you are so angry with me, and spiteful towards me? You have generally been considerate and even tender. I suppose Courrette has supplanted me in your thoughts?"

"And what if he has?"

"What if he has!" echoed Kalnoky. "Well, if he has, so much the worse for me, and possibly for you."

"You are a coward to threaten me," she answered, becoming more angry.

"I have not come here to threaten you, but to give you a piece of news."

"Well, what is it? Don't keep me in suspense."

"No, I won't. I have come here to tell you that Joseph Courrette, *your lover*, is a prisoner."

She staggered a little and clutched at the back of a chair with a spasmodic movement, for the information fell upon her like a blow.

Kalnoky saw her beautiful face become deathly pale, and this and her manner told him that his suspicions were confirmed, his jealousy justified, and that she loved Joseph.

"This is your doing," she hissed out, looking at him with a savage glare in her dark eyes.

"Yes, it's my doing," was his cool response.

She drew her breath quickly, and her hands opened and shut by reason of the passion that shook her.

"You coward, you miserable poltroon, you knave, you traitor, you mean, wretched cur and spy!"

She rolled out these words as if they had been venom and she was desirous of slaying him with it. But whatever he felt, his habitual coolness did not desert him, and he made reply with perfect self-command—

"Hard words do not kill."

"Would to God they did!" she cried out with fiery energy.

"How easily we should then get rid of our enemies," he rejoined. "But hard and ugly words from such pretty lips as yours are like poison in a rose."

"Keep your fulsome flattery to yourself, and if you have anything further to say, say it and be gone," she exclaimed, recovering some of her self-possession.

"I do not flatter you. I am not given to flattery. I speak what is a truth. I have much to say, and when I have said it I will, as you request, be gone."

"You are a cool, calculating knave," she said contemptuously.

"I am what you have made me, Rebecca," he answered, as he fixed his dark eyes upon her, while his voice had a ring of pathos in it.

"I have made you!"

"Yes; you have made me. I have loved you. I have been drawn towards you by a power that simply rendered me helpless. You told me that it was impossible that you could marry me, as I hoped and wished you would. It was a blow to me, but I suffered it in silence, and would have uttered no complaint, and have troubled you no more, had it not been that I saw that you were allowing Joseph Courrette to become your lover, and that you were returning his love."

"It is false. It is a lie," she cried with great warmth.

"It is not false ; it is not a lie," he answered. "A man who loves a woman cannot brook a rival, nor does he feel much compassion or kindness for his rival. I taxed Courrette with being your lover. As was to be expected, we got to high words, and from words it went to blows. He struck me."

"Would that he had killed you," she sneered bitterly.

"Your bitterness is out of place," he said. "Moreover, it conclusively proves that you do love Courrette."

"And what if I do ?" she exclaimed, allowing her anger to get the better of her again.

"It gives me justification, from my point of view, for what I have done," he answered. "I do not suppose that my act will cause you to love me, but I am at least revenged, and that is something. There are few things in life that afford one a keener sense of enjoyment than a knowledge that we have triumphed over an enemy."

"You are a calculating villain ; a cold-blooded snake !" she said fiercely.

"It may be so. We all act according to our lights. Your beauty has perhaps turned my head, and I could not bear to see another occupying the position I desired to occupy. Then, apart from this, I had a deadly insult to wipe out. Courrette struck me. I might have killed him there and then. But that would not have satisfied me. I had him in my power, and knew that I could crush him at any moment."

Rebecca looked at the speaker curiously, although mingled with her curiosity was inexpressible hate.

"And, pray, how was he in your power ?" she asked.

"I was in a position to have him arrested."

"How did you acquire that position ?" she asked excitedly, and betraying nervousness.

"I have long suspected that something was going on in your father's house. I get the credit of being a silent man, but no one can say I am lacking in powers of observation.

I have long felt sure that your father was playing a double game, and that Courrette was something different to what he professed to be. But understand this—I have not, and never have had, the slightest ill-will towards your father."

Rebecca's uneasiness had greatly increased, but this statement somewhat relieved her, though she felt terribly distressed and anxious.

"You are making a long story of it," she remarked, for she had lost her patience at his cool, calculating, deliberate manner. He seemed to weigh every word before he uttered it, and he made unnecessary pauses between the sentences.

"I don't know that I could have put what I have said into fewer words," he responded. "But I will be brief. I have watched and waited, and two nights ago I was a witness to a meeting between your father and Courrette in the dead of night."

"How did you become a witness?" she demanded angrily, and turning deathly pale.

"By means of a chink in the door," he answered drily.

"You mouchard, you contemptible spy!" she hissed, with an expression of the profoundest disgust.

"Yes, I played the part of a spy in order to give myself power. But I am not unreasonable. I am not even a spiteful man. Yesterday I asked Courrette if he had made love to you and if you favoured him. Of course jealousy prompted me to this. Jealousy is one of the strongest of human passions. I love you. You told me it was impossible for you to accept me or any man. After that I would have continued to love you in silence. I would have held my peace and borne my own sorrow. But then came this Courrette, and I watched him, and saw many things. Perhaps now you will admit that I am not so black as you imagined."

"Go on," she simply said in a cold tone.

"If Courrette had been reasonable with me things might have been different. But he was quite the reverse. He,

who is a nobody, treated me with disdain and contempt. And then the blow set my blood on fire. He was in my grasp, but he knew it not then. I was aware that he was to attend a Nihilist meeting at which a plan for the assassination of the Czar was to be arranged. He left the meeting with a companion. I followed them. I thought he would have returned here, but he and his companion went to a café, and I brought about their arrest."

Rebecca had recovered herself by this time, and her excitement had passed away. She saw clearly now that she knew the worst so far, that she must deal with this man diplomatically. To openly quarrel with him would be sheer madness. The arrest of Joseph would be serious enough, but matters might become infinitely more serious, for if suspicion was aroused against her father, everything he possessed would be seized, and he and she would be cast into prison. It meant utter ruin for them. And so stern, so unrelenting, so unreasoning were the authorities, that any one against whom the faintest breath of suspicion of Nihilism was breathed could not hope to escape terrible punishment. Rebecca shuddered as these things passed through her mind, but that was the only outward sign she gave of what her feelings were.

"There is something honest about you, at any rate," she said, "for you are at least free from hypocrisy."

He bowed, and answered—

"Thank you. Even that small modicum of praise from you is something."

"Well, now that you have placed your supposed rival in the grasp of the law, do you feel satisfied?" she asked.

"To some extent—yes."

"And the result—what will that be?"

"The result to him? I neither know what it will be, nor do I care. That indifference you cannot wonder at."

"No," she said. "I cannot. You are jealous, and jealousy

makes men mad and cruel. But tell me, what do you hope to gain ? ”

“ I can scarcely answer that at present. The chapter of accidents may bring me much. All I desire is to gain your favour. If Joseph Courrette occupies no place in your heart his arrest and his future fate cannot affect you much, and so I shall live on hope.”

She saw how unwise it would be to change his views in this matter, since if he chose to lay information against her father the result would be disastrous. So she answered, “ Courrette does not occupy a place in my heart.”

“ Good ; then you cannot mourn him, and I may have a chance to win you.”

“ You may if the impossible can be accomplished,” she said, in the most emphatic manner.

A dark shade came into his face, and he was about to make some reply when the door opened and Cohen entered. He seemed much surprised at finding Kalnoky there, and exclaimed—

“ Hullo, what does this mean ? ”

“ I have been having some talk with your daughter,” Kalnoky replied, “ but she will no doubt tell you all about it, it is therefore not necessary for me to remain, and I will return to my duties.”

CHAPTER XXV.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR REVELATION.

SOLOMON COHEN's face betrayed the fact that he was very troubled ; and, whereas at any other time he might have demanded to know immediately what Kalnoky was doing there, he seemed now to forget him as soon as he had departed, and turning to his daughter he said—

" Rebecca, I have some bad news for you."

" Yes ; I know what it is. Joseph has been arrested."

" How do you know it ? " asked her father quickly.

" Kalnoky has told me."

" Kalnoky ? "

" Yes ; that is why he was here. He came to inform me that he himself had given the information which led to Courrette's arrest."

" Kalnoky did ? " cried her father in amazement.

" Yes ; he is a villain and a traitor," said Rebecca. " But we must be careful. We are in his power. He may crush us."

Cohen sank into a chair and wiped his forehead. This information seemed to knell the doom of all his plans, to annihilate his hopes, and to write " Ruin " in big letters before his eyes.

Rebecca told him all that had passed between her and Kalnoky, and the old man groaned when she had finished, and he asked in a hollow tone what was to be done.

" Calm yourself," said his daughter. " Remember, caution

and diplomacy are what are wanted. I am a woman, and I think I know how to manage Kalnoky. But Joseph is arrested ; that is grave. What the consequences to him will be will depend what they can prove against him. He is too much attached to us and too staunch to utter a single word that will compromise us. But one thing is certain. The police will pay a domiciliary visit to us in order to try and obtain information against their prisoner.* Therefore lose no time, but burn or conceal every paper or anything else that could be turned against us. As for Kalnoky, leave him to me. I think I can manage him."

Cohen was greatly distressed, but he rose equal to the occasion. He knew that what his daughter said was only too true, and that the visit of the police might take place at any moment. There was no time to be lost.

"Go to Joseph's room," he said, "and bring down every scrap of paper and every letter you can lay your hand on. If his box is locked we will break it open. Nothing must be found that can implicate him. While you are gone I will look after affairs here."

Rebecca lost no time in carrying out her father's instructions, and as soon as she had left the room Cohen opened his great desk, and from a secret drawer he drew forth a bundle of letters and other documents. And having turned the key in the door, he wheeled a small table against the wall, and placing a chair on the table, clambered up and pushed open a small panel right underneath the cornice of the ceiling ; and in the hole revealed he deposited the bundle, carefully closing the panel again. Originally there had been a ventilator in this place, but for some reason or other it had been done away with. Perhaps the very reason was that Solomon saw that it would afford him a safe receptacle for compromising documents. At any rate, from

* A domiciliary visit means that the police or gendarmes, armed with a warrant, can search the house of any suspected person, and seize anything that may tell against the person suspected.—*The Author*.

the floor of the room, it was absolutely impossible to detect the panel ; and no one would have thought of searching there unless his suspicions were aroused beforehand. As Solomon descended from his perch there was a smile on his face ; it was a smile of satisfaction, for he thought that his place of concealment would defy detection. Rubbing the dust off his hands he muttered—

"They may come now. They will find nothing against me. I have always been too cautious."

As Rebecca proceeded to Joseph's room she met Kalnoky, who occupied a room in the same passage. Rebecca was glad she had met him accidentally, because she wanted to see him, but was reluctant to send for him. They were both of them for the moment confused at thus unexpectedly coming face to face, but of the two Rebecca was the more collected ; and taking advantage of the other's slight embarrassment she remarked—

"You do not seem at ease. You are evidently troubled. Is it because you have done us this wrong?"

"You say, 'done *us* this wrong,'" he replied, repeating her words. "In the 'us' do you include yourself?"

"Yes. Certainly."

"How can Courrette's arrest be a direct wrong to you?" he asked quickly.

"Courrette was in our employ. He was exceedingly useful, and my father trusted him. Therefore in depriving us of his services you have certainly done us a wrong."

"That is a roundabout way of putting it, and if that is the only wrong it is a slight one," said Kalnoky. "But you have another motive for speaking like that. You *love* this Joseph Courrette."

"It's a lie," she exclaimed, as her face became very red.

"You like him, then. I'll put it that way."

"Yes. I do like him. Is there any reason why a woman should not like a man?"

"None," answered Kalnoky, with the most perfect self-

possession. "But there is another side to the case. Joseph Courrette made love to you."

"He did," she answered boldly.

Kalnoky smiled as though he had won a triumph. But before he could speak she added quickly—

"So did you make love to me."

"I did, but with different results."

"What do you mean?" she cried, displaying some anger.

"I mean that I was repulsed, while he was not."

"That is an utterly false statement," she replied firmly.

"I gave him precisely the same answer as I gave you. I told him that it was impossible for me to reciprocate his passion."

"Rebecca, tell me why it is impossible?" asked Kalnoky as he fixed his eyes upon her.

"Yes, I will tell you," she answered, "and perhaps when you know you will respect me, and have more consideration for me. I am bound to another man."

"Who?" he asked quickly, and in great surprise.

"It is not necessary for me to tell you his name or anything about him beyond this. He is not in this country. He is far, far from here. I am not even sure that he is living. I do not, as a matter of fact, think that he is living, for I have not heard from him for a long time, and if he were living he would hardly remain silent, unless he is false to the vows he made to me. Now, are you satisfied?"

"To some extent I am. But, supposing this man you speak of should be dead?"

"Well, and if he were?"

"Well, would you consider yourself free to accept some one else?"

For an instant she was a little taken aback by the question, but only for an instant. Then she saw the drift of it, and her woman's wit came to her aid.

"Yes, if it were so, I should certainly be free to accept any one I chose; but whether I should so choose would depend——"

"Depend on what?"

"On several things."

"Tell me some of them."

"A woman has to be won," she answered.

"If a man thinks it worth his while to attempt to win a woman, he must prove himself worthy of her."

"That is true," he said. Then he paused and looked fixedly at her for some moments, and at last added, with a great show of self-possession—"I should like to win you, because I love you, and I would do much to prove myself worthy of you."

"So far you have taken rather a strange way to do that," she returned with a scornful little laugh.

"A jealous man often does things that cause him keen regret afterwards," he remarked.

"Do you regret the step you have taken?" she asked quickly.

"Yes, to some extent I do. I regret it because it has given you pain, and I would rather give you pleasure than sorrow. But though it may be impossible to altogether undo what has been done, its effect perhaps may be mitigated?"

"How?" she exclaimed eagerly.

"I am hardly prepared to answer that question now. Wait the course of events. Only tell me now that you do not detest me."

"I do not detest you," she answered, unhesitatingly.

He caught her hand and put it to his lips, and then walked hurriedly away.

"That is a man of mystery," Rebecca thought to herself, "but I think I can fathom him and conquer him, or at any rate take the power from him to do us further harm."

Although she had not hesitated to tell him that she did not detest him, she only told him so for politic reasons, though if she had never felt before that he was repulsive to her she felt so then. But it was useless to disguise the fact

that to have him as an enemy was to create a terrible danger for her father and herself, and it was better therefore to cheat him into a belief that he had gained his point than to defy him. She knew that for a long time, owing to the part her father had taken in the Nihilist movement, he and she had been living, so to speak, on a volcano that might at any moment burst forth and destroy them. They had fancied themselves secure, but the security was threatened now, and by the very last person she would have dreamed of. This man must be conciliated and rendered impotent for mischief. No one could do this but herself. It was a hard thing for a woman to so bend her pride, to so do outrage to her feelings, to so lacerate her heart as to play love with a man against whom her soul revolted. "But I must do it," thought Rebecca; "for there are tremendous issues at stake, issues of life and death for us. I must toy with this man—fascinate him only to destroy him, as women have destroyed men before who were hateful to them. A man knows not a woman's strength until he begins to defy her. Then—then, if she be a woman such as I am, he may well tremble. Kalnoky shall find that he has made a fatal error."

Rebecca Cohen's past life was a sealed book to every one but herself and father. She had told Courrette that it was impossible that she could be his wife, and that was really so, or at any rate she believed it was so; but, nevertheless, though she had not said it in so many words, she loved him, and his arrest filled her with inexpressible grief.

She found nothing in his room that was likely to compromise him, so far as she could see. But on his table was a small deal box with a painted lid. The box was not locked, and she lifted the lid. The box contained some letters which she did not read, but on the top was a photograph of Joseph himself and a remarkably pretty girl. The pretty girl was Bertha Schmidt. Once when Joseph had gone clandestinely to Berne when she was at school he had per-

suaded her to have her photograph taken with him, and she, girl-like, had consented.

Rebecca gazed on this photograph for some time, and the workings of her face showed that she was moved by some emotion. As a matter of fact, and anomalous as it may seem, she was stirred with jealousy of this unknown woman. At last with a contemptuous toss of her head she threw the photograph disdainfully back into the box, and carried the box away with her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SERVICE OF SILENCE.

WHEN Rebecca rejoined her father she appeared so absent-minded and distressed that he asked her what was the matter. She answered him somewhat evasively, and did not tell him about the photograph. And yet, strangely enough, that photograph troubled her, and she thought to herself—

“This man has been making love to me, and I have allowed him to see that I was not indifferent to him, and yet I dare be sworn this girl in the photograph is one of his flames.”

In a few moments she actually laughed at the absurdity of her jealousy struck her, and she tried to dismiss the subject from her mind ; but she could not forget that Joseph was actually under arrest, and in all probability that meant that he was separated from her for ever. The poignancy of her grief knew no bounds, for she had come to value his friendship and his advice. She did even more than that, as she knew full well, for she regarded him with deep-seated affection ; in fact, had she analysed her own feelings, she would have found that she had given him all her woman's love, notwithstanding that she had told him that it was impossible he could be anything but a friend to her. But in thus keeping her love unknown she showed that she was at least loyal to herself and honest to him. Nevertheless, it did seem now in this darkened hour that hope lay dead at

her feet, and that her life had become as bitter as worm-wood.

Presently Solomon, who was engaged in making up some accounts, looked up, and so struck was he by his daughter's expression that he exclaimed—

"What's the matter, girl? Have you discovered anything in the lad's room that has upset you?"

Rebecca's feelings, which had been strained to their utmost tension, first by her interview with Kalnoky, second by the information of Courrette's arrest, and then by the little incident of the photograph, seemed to have reached a point of hysterical sensitiveness, and the mere question put by her father affected her beyond control, and with a passionate sob she sank into a chair and covered her face with her handkerchief. It was such an unusual thing for her to display any such womanly weakness of this kind that not only was her father much astonished, but he was really alarmed.

"What is it, child; what is it?" he exclaimed with anxiety and tenderness in his tone and manner.

Rebecca, however, could find no answer for him at that moment. Her grief held her, and she could not shake herself free. She could only weep. Solomon himself was much distressed, but he had the good sense to refrain from plying her with questions at such a moment, for he knew that only keen, nervous anguish could have overcome her in such a manner, and that it would be only a further source of irritation to talk to her for the present.

He turned to his desk, sat down and took up a pen intending to make some entries in his day-book; but before he could dip the pen in the ink a domestic announced to him that the gendarmes were in the house. And the announcement had scarcely left her lips ere the chief of the half-dozen men who had come to search the house presented himself in the room, and bowing politely said—

"It is my duty, sir, to tell you that a young man named Joseph Courrette in your employ has been arrested as a

Nihilist, and I am armed with a warrant, which I have the honour to hand for your inspection, which entitles me to search your house for anything that may tend to incriminate him."

Before Cohen could reply Rebecca had sprung to her feet, her face red and wet ; her hair dishevelled, but with the quick wit which was part of her nature she took advantage of her very condition to turn it to account.

"This, sir, is a terrible blow," she exclaimed to the officer, "and we can scarcely realize it. We have only within the last few minutes heard the news, and it has come upon us as a terrible revelation, for my father's and my own loyalty to the Emperor of this great country is so staunch that it seems an undeserved blow to us that any one in our employ should so have betrayed our confidence as to lend himself to secret plotting."

"Alas! mademoiselle," said the officer bowing very politely, and looking with admiration on her beauty, "in these troublous times no one can insure himself against these unpleasant contingencies. The master cannot control the secret workings of his employes' minds. I sympathize with you, and regret the stern necessity that compels me to carry out my unpleasant duty."

"Make no apologies, sir," answered Rebecca, as she dried her tear-wet face. "You are a representative of the law, and the law must be upheld. But I may say that this Joseph Courrette has been something more than a mere workman to us. He is young and a foreigner, and we have taken great interest in him. And for us to suddenly learn that he has betrayed our trust is a cruel sting. But I cannot believe that he is a very serious criminal. At all events, whatever the measure of his guilt is, he must have been corrupted by evil companionship, and he can have no real feeling himself, either against this country or its rulers."

"Ah, mademoiselle!" said the officer with gracious urbanity, "you are young and inexperienced in the ways of the world, and know little of the depths of wickedness to which the

human heart can sink. I would fain hope for your sake that this young man is not seriously implicated, but from what I hear I think he will prove to be a very desperate criminal indeed."

Rebecca shuddered a little, but tried hard to conceal it. The man's words fell heavily upon her, for they seemed to ring Joseph's knell. But she knew that further parley with the officer was useless. She had acted a little part, and, as she believed, acted it well. Her aim had been to avert suspicion from herself and father as much as possible, and it seemed to her that she had accomplished her purpose.

The search was proceeded with, and Solomon, with an admirable air of injured innocence and a perfect assumption of frankness and straightforwardness, gave up his keys, and threw open his drawers and cupboards. But he did not carry this to an excess so as to create suspicion and mistrust. He was far too shrewd for that. He even made some demur when the officer insisted on looking into the drawers of his safe. He protested that they contained nothing but private business documents, and he only yielded reluctantly. Of course, nothing whatever of a compromising character was found in these drawers, and Cohen scored a point in his favour.

Two or three hours were spent by these men in searching the house. They were used to the work, and they did it very thoroughly, but had to go away at last without having made any discovery. Rebecca drew a sigh of relief when she saw the last of them, and she said to her father—

"This is a warning to us, and we must profit by it."

Solomon smiled. He could smile now, for he felt secure.

"I have brought caution to a state of perfection," he said with a chuckle. "But still, as you say, the warning must not be lost."

Rebecca's thoughts naturally turned to Kalnoky, who, if he had been so disposed, might have betrayed them, but it was evident he had not done so; and she said to herself—"I have conquered this man. He is for the time my slave, and

I am not a woman if I do not so shackle him that henceforth he shall be powerless for mischief."

That afternoon she purposely put herself in the way to meet him, and she said—

"We have stood the test of a search, thanks to you. You could have sold us, but you have remained true. I am neither ungrateful nor forgetful, as you shall find."

He seemed agreeably surprised by her change of tone and manner. He had scarcely expected so much, at least not so soon.

"If I have rendered you any service I am more than proud," he answered. "My service has been the service of silence. That silence shall remain unbroken for ever, so far as I am concerned, if you will only give me hope."

She felt a repugnance that she dare not show, much less utter, but she did outrage to her feelings, and holding forth her hand, she said—

"You have made me grateful, very grateful to you. Gratitude may lead to something else some day. Are you content with that answer?"

"Yes," he replied as he kissed her hand. "You could not say more now; but have you forgotten that you told me that it was impossible that I could win you? What am I to understand by this change of front?"

He watched her narrowly as he spoke, though she betrayed not the slightest sign of confusion, but met his gaze firmly and boldly.

"I did tell you so," she answered, "even as recently as this morning, and I told you the literal and solemn truth. But who can tell but what the barrier which has hitherto existed may be removed?"

"What is the meaning of this? What does it point to?" he asked quickly and eagerly.

"Never mind now. Be satisfied with the answer I have given you. Be patient, and do not harass me. The patient man generally wins in the end."

She left him, and when she had gone he chuckled to himself and said—

"I did not think I should have had such an easy triumph."

Each was playing a game, and it was a question which would win in the end. With Rebecca it was purely a matter of self-interest. In Kalnoky's case, if he was unscrupulous he was at least sincere in his desire to gain her affection and love, and up to this point he had only shown himself unscrupulous so far as his rival was concerned. He dwelt upon the words Rebecca had spoken to him as one does dwell upon that which brings pleasure and delight; but she not only dismissed him from her mind but absolutely forgot him.

A little later when she and her father sat together, as was their wont in the evening when the day's work was done, though as a matter of fact Solomon's work was seldom finished, and his evenings were generally devoted to checking his accounts, she said curtly—

"Father, Kalnoky has made love to me, and would like me to be his wife. I have told him he may hope."

Solomon pushed his grey hairs from off his forehead with a nervous, irritable action. Then he looked at her fixedly through his spectacles for some minutes, and at last said—

"Are you mad, or making a fool of him?"

"I am making a fool of him," she answered.

"Why?"

"Because if I don't I shall make an enemy of him, and Kalnoky as our enemy will be a standing danger."

The old man seemed to sink into himself for a time, until at last he said, with the air of one who had given weighty deliberation to what he was going to say—


"We will see if we cannot render Kalnoky powerless to do us harm. If he has a sting in him it shall be drawn."

"Leave him to me," Rebecca remarked. "I know how to manage him, and will do so. He can render us great service, and we must use him. But when the proper time comes he shall learn how terrible an enemy a woman may be."

CHAPTER XXVII.

WITH DEEP DESIGN.

ANY one who knows anything of Russia will scarcely need to be told that justice in that country is often the justice of revenge. This is particularly the case where political offenders are concerned, and not many countries could show such a ghastly list of barbarous cruelties practised upon prisoners as Russia. The records of the well-known fortress prison of St. Peter and St. Paul would make one's blood curdle with horror could they be known in their entirety. Even what is known reveals such a system of hideous cruelty that it is difficult to realize that such things have happened in a country that has the slightest claims to civilization. And yet this fortress is, relatively speaking, a paradise as compared with the dreadful Russian Bastile known as Schlusselfburg—the State prison—which stands on an island of granite in the lake of Ladoga. This is a large lake about fifty miles to the north of St. Petersburg. It is to this place that the most desperate of political offenders are sent whom the Government consider it desirable to get rid of, but whom they cannot legally condemn to death. And when once a man or woman enters the portals of that dread prison all hope in this world has gone. Never again does the outside world hear anything of them ; and tortures of the most fiendish character are practised on the unhappy victims until they succumb. Then their bodies are sewn in canvas, heavily weighted with stones, and cast into the lake. The grave



itself is not more dumb than Schlüsselburg, for no voice ever comes from it, and the friends of the prisoners who are confined there never hear anything of them from the moment the iron doors close behind them. There is no place in the whole of vast Russia whose secrets are more jealously guarded than are those of this living tomb.

And then Siberia! The very name awakens dormant memories of horror that cause a shudder even to think of them. In that vast and desolate region, that region of frozen death and mysterious silence, thousands of unhappy victims have gone to a doom with which the fabled torments of Hell would almost compare favourably. It is to this strange and inhospitable Siberia that Russia sends such of her political offenders as she cannot get even the shadow of an excuse to hang. And though many do escape from the black horror they have to endure it is often to find certain death in the trackless frozen swamps, or the weird and limitless forests where the ravening wolves prowl in search of their prey.

Let it not be supposed that the foregoing remarks are intended to express any sympathy on the part of the writer with the Nihilists, except such sympathy as one might show even to the blackest criminal upon whom unnecessary cruelty was practised. They are intended more to emphasize what has so frequently been stated on unquestionable authority, about the semi-barbarous condition of Russia. In no country in the world, certainly not amongst European nations, is political morality at so low an ebb, while corruption exists in every department of the State from the highest to the very lowest.¹ Freedom exists not in the country.

¹ A startling piece of evidence of this fact came under my personal knowledge a short time ago. A regiment of soldiers from a small town to the north of Moscow was sent to the Crimea to take part in some military manœuvres. For three days the men were almost starved, their only food during the day consisting of black bread and some water. During six weeks that they were in the Crimea, they were allowed to go almost bare-footed while the greatcoats that ought to have been served out to them

The press is fettered, and all the writers are mere hirelings. The people are muzzled, and the mighty military machine grinds the soul out of the wretched peasantry. Nominally serfdom is extinct in the Czar's domain, but a tyrannizing system of extortionate taxation is allowed to obtain, in comparison with which the former serfdom was freedom. Steeped to the lips in ignorance, ill fed, badly clothed, drunken and debased, it may be doubted if in all the civilized world there is a more miserable class of people than the Russian peasantry. Their only redeeming features would seem to be their exemplary patience and heroic endurance under long-suffering and hardship. It is from the ranks of the peasantry that the Nihilists are largely recruited. Sedition is secretly preached amongst the wretched people, who lend willing ears, and in the vain hope that they can help to lift their country out of its darkness, and inaugurate an era of prosperity and happiness they readily become enthusiastic tools of knaves and fanatics. It has been said that the vast army of Nihilists is made up of one-third fools, one-third knaves, and the other third fanatics. There may be a measure of truth in this; but one thing is beyond all doubt—the Nihilist movement is the struggle of a people who groan under a tyrannous despotism.

As the time for the trial of Strovella and Joseph Courrette approached, Rebecca grew more uneasy and unhappy. They

were withheld. When some of the men ventured to complain of their treatment to the Commander they were severely punished on a plea of being insubordinate. Subsequently some of the horses belonging to the regiment died, as it was alleged, from actual starvation. This led to an inquiry being opened, and it turned out that the contractor for this particular regiment, and who, according to the terms of his contract, was to supply everything, including food, fodder, greatcoats, and shoes, was the *brother of the Commander*. This worthy Commander had powerful friends in high places, and the result was, the whole affair was *hushed up*. Such instances as this of the prevailing corruption might be multiplied almost *ad infinitum*, but the foregoing, which is strictly accurate, will serve as an illustration.—*The Author*.

had been in prison three weeks, and the trial was fixed for the end of the month, and Rebecca knew only too well that it would all be a mockery, for they were already condemned beforehand. She grieved for Joseph sincerely, though she kept her thoughts to herself, and knowing the power that Kalnoky had gained, she led him to believe that she was coming to care for him. But every day that went by only served to strengthen the loathing contempt she felt, and it was with the extremest difficulty that she controlled her feelings so far as to simulate toleration for him.

Ever since she had discovered that photograph in Joseph's room she had grown restless and irritable, and this restlessness and irritability increased as the day of the trial drew near.

One evening, a few days before the trial, she said to her father—

"What do you think will be the verdict on Joseph?"

"Siberia or Schlüsselburg," answered Cohen curtly.

Rebecca shuddered as she exclaimed—

"Can *nothing* be done to save him?"

"Nothing," said her father, in a tone of distress; "at any rate nothing that I know of." He was evidently much concerned about Joseph, and after a long pause said—"This lad is a brave lad, and it is a pity he should have fallen a victim. He is honest, too, and staunch, for it is certain he has not spoken a word against us, or unpleasant consequences to us would have happened before now. I would give much money to save him, but, alas, I fear he is beyond our help."

Rebecca made no further remark, for she was troubled and downcast, but nevertheless her father's words—"I would give much money to save him"—were not lost upon her. She pondered upon them, and all night long she was restless and uneasy, and almost distracted herself by trying to think out some ways and means of setting Joseph free from the grip of the law. But she could think of nothing, for she knew no one in whom she could trust or would be likely to

give her guidance. But when she rose in the morning it suddenly flashed upon her like an inspiration that Kalnoky might help her. At any rate she held him in thrall, as long as he believed he was in the way to win her, and she might repose in him and use him, for it was hardly likely that he would betray her so long as she fostered his hope that she would ultimately give herself to him.

In the course of the day she put her idea to the test, and purposely sought an interview with Kalnoky.

"You are aware," she began, "that in a few days Joseph Courrette is to be tried. You can also forecast, as we all can, what his fate will be unless he is saved by something little short of a miracle. You have brought him to this, and your revenge so far is complete. But listen to this, and do not mistake my meaning, you cannot punish him without punishing me too."

"You love him, then?" cried Kalnoky, angrily.

"No; I said not that, and did not imply it. But I like him, and he was a valuable servant to my father. You profess to be anxious to win my affection; do you think you are going the right way to do so?"

"Joseph Courrette was my rival; he insulted me, and I trapped him," said Kalnoky sullenly.

"You did," answered Rebecca, scornfully, "and now do you not think you would show magnanimity by trying to devise some plan by which he could be untrapped?"


Kalnoky smiled. It was the smile of a man who felt that he was winning. Then he said, after turning the matter over in his mind—

"I know of no means."

"None whatever?" she queried pointedly.

"No." And after a long pause he added, "But answer me this. Supposing, I only say *supposing*, that it *were* possible to get him free, what then?"

"What then! Well, I should have infinitely more regard for you than I have at present," she answered boldly.



"Indeed!" he said, with an ironical chuckle. "Really, Rebecca, you must think I am a very simple man, if you imagine that I am to be so easily gulled. Assuming the possibility of Courrette escaping the doom that awaits him, what chance should I have?" There was something in Kalnoky's manner that led Rebecca to conjecture that he did see some way to the end she was aiming at. He was a deep and designing man, and believed himself to be very clever, perhaps cunning would better express it, though he might not have admitted this word. But Rebecca was a woman of keen perception, and she probed him infinitely better than he imagined. She saw with a woman's eye how she could twist him to her use, and believing that he could be of use, she resolved there and then to have no scruples about using him, and deceiving him, too, if needs be.

"You ask me what chance you would have," she said. "Listen; if it were possible to free Courrette I vow and declare that on the day that saw him free I would give you my hand, and say, Kalnoky I am yours. And note this, if a golden key should be wanted to open his prison door with, it can be found."

He was surprised and flushed with excitement as he saw, or, at any rate, thought he saw, the way to gratify his desires, and, according to her words, win her. Her declaration was definite enough if he could only bind her to it.

"The golden key might be important, nay, indispensable," he said, mysteriously; "that is if a chance could be found to carry out your wishes. But what guarantee have I, assuming that it could be done—what guarantee have I that you would be true to your bargain?"

"My own word," she answered with a sneer.

"That is not much to depend upon," he remarked, with a contemptuous smile. "I will not go so far as to say that you are not sincere enough now, but you know we are only human, and human nature at the bottom is very deceitful."

"It is," she said, ironically and with great emphasis that there was no mistaking.

"I accept your taunt," he answered. "I do not claim to be a saint. I may be infinitely worse than some men, and infinitely better than others. Though whatever you may think to the contrary, I am not as black as you seem to think me. I have been a faithful servant to your father ; and though I have seen much I have held my peace. Long before Joseph Courrette appeared on the scene I told you that I loved you. Your answer was that it was utterly impossible you could be anything to me. I retired into silence again after that assurance, and kept my sorrow to myself. I am not a sentimental man, but I may confess to having suffered considerably by your answer. Then came Courrette, and I saw things that opened my eyes, and rightly or wrongly I believed you were favouring him. It made me mad. I watched, and chance placed him in my power. But even then I would have hesitated to use that power, if he had not so grossly insulted me. For your sake I might regret what I have done. For your sake I might try to undo it ; but I want to possess you, and since it is certain that we do not stand at present in the position of ardent lovers, at any rate so far as you are concerned, I want some guarantee that you will become mine, if I should succeed in carrying out your wishes, and setting this Courrette free."

She listened to his speech without any show of impatience, and never once interrupted him. Nor was his argument altogether lost upon her, and she thought to herself—

"I have been doing this man some wrong. He is certainly not as bad as I deemed him to be."

Still, her feelings were all with Courrette. She had told him that some day he might aid her in her revenge. Revenge for what she had not said ; now as it seemed to her she had lost him for ever, for he was in the iron and merciless grip of the law.

"Tell me," she said to Kalnoky. "What guarantee do you want?"

"Not now, but to-morrow you shall know," he answered.

"Good: I will wait until to-morrow; but remember time presses, and there is none to be lost if Courrette is to be saved."

Kalnoky smiled a smile that was full of meaning, and yet she failed to understand it. But she gathered, at least, that she had not altogether fathomed him.

"It shall be to-morrow," he said; "and now adieu." He took her hand, pressed it to his lips, and left her.

For a moment she stood silent. Then, with an expression of contempt on her beautiful face, she muttered—

"Alexander Kalnoky, you are playing a part, so am I. But you must play well if you would outwit me. I have at stake hope, happiness, love, the lives of myself and my father, and these things go not from me without a desperate struggle."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEAD SEA."

ON the following day Kalnoky handed Rebecca a strip of paper on which the following was written, and asked her to sign it—

I, Rebecca Cohen, hereby fully acknowledge that both I and my father, Solomon Cohen, have for a long time been identified with the Nihilists, and that we have given them every possible assistance, and are quite in sympathy with the movement.

Rebecca read this in profound astonishment, and she was pale and trembled as, crushing the strip of paper up in her hand, she demanded angrily, "Do you suppose that I am such a mad, blind fool as to sign a paper like that?"

"I don't suppose you are a fool at all," he answered, coldly and unmoved, "and when you have thought the matter over a little you will see that it is not such an outrageous request on my part as you now deem it."

"It is monstrous, and I should be mad to put my hand to such a document," Rebecca cried, excitedly.

"I do not think so," he remarked, "nor will you think so presently. What are the facts? You ask me to use my endeavours to free Courrette. I do not say I can succeed in doing that, but I will try. Assume now that I succeeded, what assurance have I that you will not turn round on me, and throw me over?"

"You have the assurance of my promise," she exclaimed, indignantly.

"Very well, then, I will give you a similar assurance," he said. "I will promise you solemnly that I will never use that paper as long as you carry out your bargain with me, and the day that you become my wife I will hand you the paper back, and you shall destroy it. And I further promise that no mortal eyes but mine and your own shall ever see it so long as you keep faith with me."

"Your wife," she murmured, in an absent sort of way, and instinctively shrinking from him.

"Yes. Have you not so promised me?"

"Ah, true," she said, as if she had only just remembered it.

He scrutinized her very keenly. He seemed to be trying to read her thoughts, and perhaps to some extent he succeeded. At any rate his remark seemed to indicate this, for he said—

"The paper I ask you to sign seems to me more than ever necessary, if for no other reason than to remind you occasionally that I have some claim upon you."

"Supposing I refuse to sign that paper?" she asked, huskily, betraying that she was very much agitated.

He shrugged his shoulders, as he answered carelessly and with assumed indifference—

"That is your affair. If you do not, it is pretty certain that Joseph Courrette will have to accept his fate. If you are so deeply interested in him as to want to get him free, and you seek my aid to that end, you must naturally expect that there shall be some conditions. For the fulfilment of those conditions I want a material guarantee, and if you are sincere you will give it. If you are not, you won't."

She felt greatly irritated by his cool, calculating manner, and the business-like way in which he treated the whole affair. But she was conscious that his argument was right, and she knew that it would not be safe to quarrel with him.

She was already in his power. If she defied him would he not use that power? Still that document that he wanted her signature to would be such a tremendous instrument in his hands, and he might use it as a means of unlimited extortion. Concealing her anger as best she could, she answered—

“Under any circumstances, I must have time to consider the matter. I cannot decide to sign such a paper without grave reflection.”

“Reflect as long as you like,” he said. “I am willing to wait.”

It need scarcely be said that Rebecca's position caused her grave trouble and anxiety. To offend Kalnoky would, as she knew too well, be dangerous, while the impending fate of Courrette filled her with sorrow to which she could give no words. Under any circumstances, if Kalnoky were to breathe a word to the authorities against herself and her father, utter ruin and dire punishment would be the result. No wonder that she shuddered inwardly as she thought of this. Kalnoky had impaled her on the horns of a dilemma, and she was between the Devil and the Dead Sea. Even if circumstances had not been as they were she would have had to crush her heart to have become the wife of Kalnoky. For though she knew and had told Courrette that it was impossible she could be his, yet, nevertheless, she loved him, and to a woman what does love mean? To Rebecca it meant more than ordinary, for a heavy shadow had come into her early life, and she had seen her hopes go down in darkness—and the dreams, such as all women dream—had been to her mocking visions that had tortured her. If Courrette had never crossed her path she would no doubt have gone on with her sorrow concealed, and every year as it gathered on her head would have increased her cynicism, and tinged her life with more bitterness. But now all was changed again. Courrette was only as a misty vision that was growing fainter and fainter. He would pass from her view if he went to the

solitudes of Siberia as effectually as if he went into the gloom of the grave. And yet he would live, live with the awful torture of memory ever goading him into madness, and she well knew that for him life would be filled with infinitely more bitterness than the fear of death could possibly bring. In fact death under such circumstances would be a blessing, while life would be a curse.

Such thoughts as these troubled her mind for several days, and she could come to no decision in regard to that document. It was as a nightmare to her. At first she was inclined to lay the matter before her father, but when she had reasoned the subject out it seemed to her that that would be an unwise thing to do, and it would be infinitely better to conceal the whole thing from him. If she took the step it must be entirely on her own responsibility, but there was the point that troubled her, and she certainly was troubled so that her rest at night and her appetite in the day were affected, and her face took on a worn weary expression. When her father noticed this and questioned her, she said she was anxious about Courrette, and feared that possibly some revelation at the trial might implicate them. Cohen himself was scarcely less anxious, and so he did not ask his daughter not to let the matter affect her so much. As a matter of fact, he said nothing, for what could he say?

During those terrible days that intervened before the trial Rebecca felt like one who was groping in the dark on the edge of a precipice. She spoke no word to Kalnoky nor he to her, except when they met by chance, then passed such commonplace remarks as rose uppermost in their minds. He was the silent man as of yore—silent but watchful, for if he said nothing very little escaped his penetrating gaze. He was a strange man, because, while seeming to be moody he was not so, and if he preferred solitude it was rather because he seldom found those in whom he felt any interest. Such a man was likely to be eccentric, or rather what the world would call so, for any one

who happens to be not altogether commonplace is very apt to be referred to as "an eccentric individual." Therefore his mode of dealing with Rebecca was quite in keeping with his character, and that he was enamoured with her there could be little doubt. He knew, perhaps, nay, it is certain that he must have known, that his admiration was not returned, but after the manner of men, who, setting a goal up for themselves, press towards it in spite of all obstacles, so he pressed forward to his, always believing that ultimately he would succeed in winning, if not actual love from her at any rate respect. Perhaps this was a delusion and a snare, but it is in the very order of things that such men do unconsciously delude themselves. They follow a phantom, believing it a reality.

The day of Courrette's trial came at last. In addition to himself and his colleague Strovelle, there were twelve others put on trial with them. The proceedings were not likely to last long. They never did in these cases, for the authorities generally collected such a mass of evidence beforehand, and everything was so cut and dried, that practically there was nothing to do but to pronounce the verdict by the Judges, and so that day, ere the winter's sun went down, Courrette and his companions knew their doom, and that doom was the dreaded Siberia. Strovelle was banished for life, and Courrette for twenty years, five of which were to be passed in the dreadful mines at Nertchinsk, 4,500 miles from Moscow, and in one of the most desolate regions of Siberia.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HERR MOSSE.

ALTHOUGH a sudden break in the sequence of a narrative may at times seem inartistic, and be not without some irritating influence on those who read, it occasionally happens that, having a due regard for the action of the story as well as its general interest, a total change of scene becomes necessary. In the present case we must go back to Switzerland and Zurich once more, in order to take up the dropped thread of that part of the story which deals with Count von Arenberg and his young wife.

The silly vanity of Frau Schmidt had hurried her on at such a rate that she had not had time to pause, nor time to reflect, nor to look back, nor even to look ahead. The climax of her vanity was reached when at last she was able to speak of her daughter as "the Countess," and as such a woman as the Frau is never free from spitefulness of a very petty kind, she took delight in making her poorer neighbours and relatives feel her tremendous superiority. She tried to dazzle with her supposed effulgence all those who, she was pleased to think, were beneath her in social status. Whether she succeeded or not is another thing.

Of course all this was very stupid and very vulgar, but then the reader will long ago have discovered that the Frau was essentially stupid and essentially vulgar. Nor was the mere fact of her daughter having married a title altogether sufficient for her. She herself wanted to live in the light of

that title, and so she insisted on the young couple settling in the neighbourhood. And as it so chanced, a property so close to her own residence, and known as *Chateau*, had long been in the market. It was an obtrusive, inartistic, and pretentious sort of place. It was one of that class of houses whose builders aim at so much and accomplish so little, but it is not to the purpose that it should be described in all its details. Suffice to say that it was a large house, with some outline resemblance to an ancient castle, including a square tower and battlemented roof. But it was antiquity disguised in new bricks and white stones, with "modern" writ large upon it. As a consequence, it offended against good taste as well as outraged the canons of true art. Perhaps it was in this very particular that it appealed most to the sentiments of the Frau ; for, from the moment that it became certain that her daughter was to be the wife of a real Count, she had an eye to this property, and set about trying to secure it, but knowing how to drive a keen bargain, she haggled over the price, and finally succeeded in securing it at a figure much below what was originally asked, and then with that ostentatious show of magnanimity which was inseparable from all her acts she presented her purchase to her daughter when the young couple returned from their honeymoon tour. In settling it upon her daughter she evinced her shrewdness, for though she had dealt very liberally with her son-in-law she did not deem it prudent that he should have everything in his own hands.

The Chateau was perched on a hill side, commanding a very fine view, and round about it were considerable grounds laid out with a fair amount of taste. The house itself was large, and might have been made into a respectable mansion on a small scale. Anyway it was a place to be coveted. So some people thought, and many of the well-to-do shopkeepers had cast longing eyes towards it, but the expense of keeping it up appalled them, for your Swiss, while loving show and gilt, hates parting with his money. If the Swiss

can only assume an appearance of grandeur they will suffer any amount of personal discomfort and inconvenience. For they are a people of make-believes and shams—a people small in their ideas and small in their acts, and yet with a most exaggerated sense of their own importance.

Count von Arenberg and his wife soon settled down to the serious business of housekeeping. They had made rather an extended tour through Germany, and the Count had taken his wife to see a few of his relations. But Bertha was by no means impressed with these representatives of his family. They were very poor, and eked out an existence in genteel poverty.

Of course the Frau questioned her daughter a good deal when she returned, and was rather disappointed at the answers she received. For Bertha had to say that she had seen only three or four of his relatives, and these three or four were a shady lot. Of course the Frau did not make this known. It was one of the little matters she kept strictly to herself, for obvious reasons.

A short time after the young couple's return a strange man one day presented himself at the Chateau. That is, he was strange to Bertha, but he was evidently well acquainted with her husband. It so happened that the Count was absent, and so the card of the stranger was taken to his wife. It bore this inscription—

RUDOLPH MOSSE,
Agent Militaire,
Frankfort-am-Main.

The Countess naturally concluded that Herr Rudolph Mosse, from Frankfort, was a friend of her husband, and so, in the absence of the Count, she went herself to see him. The instant, however, that her eyes fell upon the face of Herr Rudolph Mosse she took a prejudice against him, and of course for no other reason than that of his personal appearance. *That* certainly was against him. His hair was

cropped close to his skull in true Continental fashion, so that the scalp was plainly visible. Herr Mosse had the misfortune, too, to be ponderously stout, with a fat, sensuous-looking face, the whole expression of which was suggestive of self-interests first.

He bowed very politely as the Countess entered.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Madame la Comtesse," he said with a smirking smile, and gazing on her with an envious look of admiration.

"The Count is absent, sir," she answered, a little disconcerted by his manner and his looks. "I presume you have some business with him."

"Yes, madame. I am a great friend of your husband, and there are certain little matters between us which no doubt will induce him to accord me a jovial welcome."

Bertha eyed the visitor keenly, and somehow felt uneasy, though she could not have told why, save it was that the man was vulgar, and had that easy, jaunty self-assurance and obtrusive personality which are so objectionable.

"Have you known the Count long?" she asked with some misgivings.

"Oh, yes, a long time."

"And is your visit now strictly on business?"

"Yes. Well, that is, I've come to congratulate him also—as well indeed he may be congratulated in having married a lady so exquisitely beautiful as yourself."

The Countess's face reddened with anger, and, assuming an air of lofty dignity, she said with frigid coldness—

"I will leave you, sir. Perhaps you will be able to amuse yourself till my husband's return. In the meantime I will order one of the servants to supply you with some coffee and cigars."

She did not give him a chance of replying, but hurriedly left the room. Now the Countess was a very inexperienced young person, and knew little of the world and its ways, while in many respects she was little more than a child.

But there came into her head there and then an idea that this Rudolph Mosse was not a friend, but an enemy and that he was a dangerous man. She would have found some difficulty in explaining why she came to this conclusion, but it is universally admitted that a woman reasons by instinct and intuition, and not by logic, and very frequently she is right where a man, who goes through an elaborate process of calculations and deductions, is wrong. At any rate the Countess had her thoughts, and they made her very uneasy, and when in a little while she heard that her husband had returned she went hurriedly to him, and said abruptly—

“There is a man waiting to see you. He comes from Frankfort, and his name is Rudolph Mosse.”

She spoke thus hurriedly and abruptly designedly, and as she gave utterance to the words she watched her husband very narrowly, her object being to discover if he showed any signs of surprise or distress, and herein she gave evidence that she possessed some of that artfulness which was characteristic of her mother. He showed both, and she saw the colour fade from his face and an expression of great anxiety and annoyance come there; and before he could make any reply she demanded angrily, almost imperiously, as it seemed—

“Who is this man—this Rudolph Mosse?”

Had she possessed more experience of the world, and been a woman of more tact, she would have proceeded with more caution, and not have angered her husband, seeing that she had nothing at all to go upon save Mosse's general appearance and his coarse manner and vulgar familiarity.

The Count turned upon her with such vehemence that she fairly started back. He had, in fact, lost his self-control or *he* would surely have acted differently.

“What do you mean by speaking to me like that?” he cried hotly. “I am not your servant, and, though your money has bought my title, it hasn't bought my thoughts

or my independence. Rudolph Mosse is an acquaintance of mine, and he or any other of my acquaintances have a perfect right to come to my house if I am disposed to receive them."

He left the room in a temper, banging the door violently after him, and Bertha stood for some moments dumb with amazement. Then, covering her face with her hands, she burst into violent weeping.

It was, perhaps, the first real sorrow she had known in all her life. But it was something more than sorrow. Her pride had been grossly insulted, and the man she considered so perfect had suddenly revealed himself to her as being very human ; while within those last few minutes she had learned that her independence had gone, and that she was to be ruled, subjected, insulted, and snubbed.

To a girl so constituted and brought up as she had been brought up it was a terrible revelation, a terrible awakening to the prosaic and vulgar things of a mundane existence. Up to that moment she had, as it may fairly be said, lived in an unreal world. That is, she had seen everything through a sort of glamour begotten of her riches. She had believed and been taught to believe that she occupied an exalted station, and that to her must be rendered homage and obeisance ; and that in the sphere that she occupied she must, in a sense, rule as queen. But now it was revealed to her with brutal abruptness that she had all this time been the victim of a delusion.

Her first impulse was, and perhaps under the circumstances it was a natural one, to rush off to her mother. But she showed that she was not without a measure of good sense by checking this and resolving for the time to keep what had passed to herself. So she brushed away her tears, and sat down to try and read. But the trial was a failure. She felt unhappy, and could not get up sufficient interest in the pages before her.

About an hour later the Count came to her. Had she cared to have closely studied his face she would have noted

that he wore a look of trouble, but made an effort to disguise it.

"I spoke to you rather sharply just now, my dear," he said somewhat abjectly, "and I am very sorry for it. You must forgive me, will you?"

"Yes," she answered, coldly, as he bent over and kissed her.

"I want you to come into the salon, Bertha, and make yourself agreeable to my friend Mosse. You will find him really a capital fellow. He is not quite so polished as he might be, but he's genuine."

"If he's a friend of yours I'll try and make myself agreeable to him," she replied languidly. "But leave me now, and I'll join you in a little while."

The Count did not seem pleased, though he smiled and kissed her again, telling her not to be long. Then rolling a cigarette with a graceful ease he left the room.

The Countess did not go to her husband as she promised, but lay down on a couch instead, as she was suffering from a headache. She slept until her maid aroused her to dress for dinner. There were half a dozen guests to dinner, besides Herr Rudolph Mosse, so that the Countess had not much chance of forming a more intimate acquaintance with that gentleman then. But what little conversation she had with him, added to his vulgar manner, only served to confirm her first prejudice, and before the coffee was served she had conceived a downright positive hatred for the man, but she consoled herself with the thought that he would go soon, and she resolved that, if she could prevent it, he should not visit the Chateau again. Her surprise, therefore, may be judged when later on in the evening her husband said to her—"My dear, I hope you will try and make yourself agreeable to Herr Mosse, for I have invited him to spend two or three weeks with us."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT.

HERR RUDOLPH MOSSE, having got into good quarters, determined, as was very apparent, to thoroughly enjoy himself; and if he was conscious, and perhaps he was, that he was the cause of a breach between the Countess and her husband, he gave no sign of it, and it did not affect him. He seemed to attach himself to the Count like a limpet to a rock, and the two were apparently inseparable.

The Countess tried for a few days to conceal her disgust, and even endeavoured to make herself agreeable. But the vulgar familiarity of the guest, and his influence over her husband, so annoyed her that at last she openly displayed her feelings. Up to this time Bertha had not said anything to her mother, although the Frau almost invariably visited the Chateau daily in the course of her habitual afternoon drive. But, when at the end of the week Herr Mosse's presence had become intolerable, the Countess poured out her troubles into her mother's ear, hoping to receive advice and comfort. But what was her amazement to discover that her mother took quite a different view.

"Really, child," exclaimed the Frau rebukingly, "I gave you credit for having more common sense than to allow such a small matter as this to affect you in such a manner. You really cannot expect—if you do, you are very unreasonable—that your husband will always be dangling at your tail. Nor can you dictate to him what companions he shall keep,

unless, of course, he outrages decency and good manners. From what little I have seen of Mosse he does not strike me as being what you represent him to be. He is not quite as polished as one could desire, but he seems honest enough ; and very probably, not being in such comfortable worldly circumstances as yourself, he is loath to leave such snug quarters as the Chateau. At any rate, don't get any silly notions into your head, and do not allow shadows to make you unhappy."

Bertha was dumb at this unexpected scolding, and she began to realize that her mother was so infatuated with and wrapt up in the Count that it would have to be something very powerful indeed that would turn her against him. This was indeed true. Clothed, so to speak, in her own conceit, and blinded by her peacock-like vanity, the Frau was not disposed to scrutinize too keenly the acts and doings of her son-in-law. It was enough for her to know that her daughter was a Countess, and if the means taken to acquire that title were somewhat questionable the Frau was not affected thereby. She had, from her point of view, gained a great triumph, and she was happy, and inclined to sternly resent anything calculated to disturb her happiness. Leastways she could not see cause for uneasiness in the mere fact of the Count entertaining a friend for some weeks, even though that friend was not quite as *distingué* as a Count's friend might or perhaps ought to be. But in her own somewhat obtuse mind the Frau made allowance for this by supposing that during his military career the Count had necessarily come in contact with all sorts and conditions of men, and it was not unreasonable to suppose that some of these should try to revel in the gilded luxury which fortune had placed in the young man's way.

If this was dangerous reasoning the Frau was not aware of it, and she was perfectly satisfied with herself and not disposed to brook contradiction. Had any one had the hardihood to venture on the suggestion that she was living in a

Fool's Paradise such a person would assuredly have suffered for his temerity, and have incurred the Frau's lasting displeasure.

It is needless to say that the daughter did not share the mother's views. Bertha had certainly been a little fascinated at first, but she had, even at this early stage, begun to realize that her husband was not an idol that she could fall down and blindly worship. She had already seen too much of the clay, and between her and him an inharmonious note had been struck that jarred painfully upon her. Perhaps in some indefinite way she had believed that when she was married she would be absolute ruler, for, try to disguise the truth as one might, the fact remained that the Count had been bought and paid for, and that implied that he was to be led, and not to lead. This little incident of Rudolph Mosse served to open the Countess's eyes, and she saw that she had made a grave mistake, and that even from her own mother she could not expect sympathy.

After the lecture her mother had given her, Bertha resolved to keep her own counsel for the future in regard to her little domestic affairs, and she thought, for the sake of peace, she would even try and tolerate Mosse. This resolution would no doubt have been kept had circumstances not occurred to entirely alter it.

It chanced one day, when Mosse was in the third week of his stay at the Chateau, that the Count, who was an enthusiastic fisherman, had pledged himself to some friends for a day's fishing on the lake. Mosse was asked to join, but declined on the plea that fishing bored him, and the Countess, who was to have accompanied her husband's party, was prevented by a slight indisposition from doing so. The result was she was left behind, as was also Herr Rudolph Mosse, and this gentleman abandoned himself to lounging about, smoking cigars, and drinking *café noir*, for which he had an inordinate love.

The Countess confined herself to her own special sitting-

room, which had been very elegantly fitted up and arranged with great taste under her mother's superintendence. And it is fair to say that whatever the Frau's faults were she had an eye to artistic effect so far as the internal arrangements of a room were concerned, and she was lavish in expenditure where the sensuous faculties were to be pandered to. In this snug retreat Bertha passed the hours with such feminine fancies as attracted her for the moment. But nevertheless time hung heavily on her hands, and she suffered from *ennui*, so that she partly made up her mind to order the carriage during the afternoon, and drive over to Beau Séjour. But this plan was changed in an unexpected manner. Attired in a very costly morning robe, she was lounging on her couch, when, without any ceremony, the door was opened, and Herr Rudolph Mosse presented himself to her astonished gaze.

She sprang to her feet, her face red with indignation, and exclaimed, "Herr Mosse, this intrusion in my private room is an unpardonable liberty."

"Don't put yourself in a flurry, dear Countess," answered Mosse with an impertinent grin, and she noted with alarm that he bore unmistakable traces of having been indulging too much in alcohol, and as a matter of fact he always flavoured his black coffee with cognac. Not that he was really tipsy, but he was reckless and bold, and his face was heated and flushed.

"Leave this room, sir," she said, commandingly, "or I will summon my servants," and she made a movement to ring the bell, but he arrested her by saying with emphasis—

"Don't do that. I have something to say, and you wouldn't like me to say it before servants."

These words startled her, taken in conjunction with the opinion she had previously formed of the man, namely, that he was an enemy, and had some power over her husband. His words were ominous and seemed to the Countess to breathe danger.

"What you have to say say quickly, and then be good enough to go," she exclaimed with trembling accents.

He looked at her for a moment with a sensual gaze, and then remarked—

"You do not like me?"

"No," she answered unhesitatingly.

"Well, you are honest at least," he said, "and that is something. Now, on the contrary, I like you, and for your sake I would dare much."

He bowed and laid his fat hand upon his heart, and his greasy face was wrinkled with a smirking smile.

"Sir," she exclaimed with burning indignation, "have you come here to insult me?" and once more she placed her hand on the bell rope.

"No," he answered, "I have not, and don't ring that bell. If you do you will regret it."

There was something in the man's manner and tone that arrested her, and though she experienced a shuddering aversion for him she felt compelled, even against her will, to obey his command, for command it assuredly was. She shrank from him with fear, and felt faint. She would have screamed out, but she seemed bereft of the power of screaming. She did manage, however, in short, jerky sentences to say—

"If you are a gentleman, if you have a spark of honour in you, if you have any pity, do not remain here. Think how you will compromise my honour; think what the consequences will be should my husband return unexpectedly and find you here."

He was quite unmoved by her appeal, and exclaimed ironically—

"Your husband, forsooth! My dear lady, don't feel any concern on that point. Your husband and I perfectly understand each other, and he would *not* be jealous of me."

Bertha felt a choking sensation as she heard these words, and she really appeared about to fall, so that Mosse moved

quickly towards her, and put out his hands ; but shuddering she drew away, and by a great effort she mastered herself, for she recognized that the situation demanded presence of mind and resolution.

"Be good enough not to touch me, sir," she remarked, with such an appearance of perfect self-control, that he was amazed ; "and unless you immediately state your business and go, I will summon the household, and have you turned out."

"I see," he answered, "that you are a woman of some determination, but, as I before remarked, if you call your domestics, there will be a scene that you will regret as long as you live. I have come here to talk to you. I may say, in fact, that I have come here on business."

"Then state your business and relieve me of your presence, for you must feel and know that you are objectionable in my sight." She said this with a great deal of dignity, and yet with ill-concealed scorn.

He, however, was not affected either by her scornful manner or stinging words, but with ironical politeness he bowed again and remarked—

"My dear madame, before we are much older we shall understand each other better I have no doubt. But pray be seated, and I will tell you why I have taken the liberty to intrude upon you."

He offered her a chair, but she rejected it, saying—"I prefer to stand. And now, pray, sir, get the interview over and leave me, for you have already taxed my patience to its ultimate limit."

"As you will," he answered with a shrug of the shoulders. "But I am sorry you treat me so disdainfully, for I want to stand well with you. But, as I remarked before, we shall get on better by and by. Well now, my dear madame, this is the matter. I am a poor man, while my good and valued friend, the Count von Arenberg, is rich, thanks to you. I would, with your permission, add that he is rich in a double

sense, since he has secured one so charming and attractive as yourself."

Bertha stamped her foot impatiently and said—"If you waste time with such idle flattery I vow that I will leave you."

"Most women like to be told that they are charming," he returned. "But I will come to the point. The Count hasn't always been rich, and in his shady days I rendered him many services. He was fond of gambling, and some time ago he incurred a gambling debt to me of nearly thirty thousand francs. It is a large sum, and, as you may possibly be aware, gambling debts are debts of honour. I was content to wait for payment so long as I knew that the Count had no funds. But when I made the pleasant discovery that he had stepped into such a slice of good luck, I felt that I was justified in applying for payment of this debt of honour. I should have kept the matter from you, but he does not seem disposed to pay, in fact he assured me that he has no means of his own, and therefore I have ventured to appeal to you feeling convinced that for the honour and credit of your family you will discharge the liability."

Bertha had listened with a sense of burning shame torturing her, and her faith in and respect for her husband were rudely shaken. But she tried to conceal what she was feeling, and in a proud, austere manner she said—

"I understand you perfectly. My husband is in your clutches because he owes you some money, and on that account you have had the impertinence to intrude yourself here. I will talk the matter over with my husband, and if he is in your debt, as you say, you may rest assured that the debt shall be discharged; and now, I beg of you to relieve me of your presence, for you have revealed the fact that you are an adventurer, and an unprincipled scoundrel."

He evidently did not like this, and for the first time he displayed annoyance, as he made answer, with a withering curl of his thick lips—

"Your harsh words were better unsaid, sweet lady, for you may find that if you insult me your pride will have a fall."

He turned on his heel and left the room, and as soon as he had disappeared Bertha darted forward, slammed the door, and locked it. And then, completely overcome, she sank down on the great wool rug, and bowing her head on a chair, she moaned with bitter anguish.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CHAIN TIGHTENS.

THE Count von Arenberg did not return from his fishing excursion until late in the evening. He came home in excellent spirits, and was very merry and talkative, telling his wife that he had spent a thoroughly happy day, but that he would have been still happier had she been there.

She listened to him without making any remark, but for the first time since she had known him she experienced a sense of disgust. Somehow it seemed as if up to that hour she had viewed him through rose-coloured spectacles, but that now the spectacles had been removed, and she saw his faults in all their glaring nakedness. It was useless to disguise the fact from herself, try as she might, that he had gone down in her estimation since that revelation made by Mosse, and this caused her an immense amount of unhappiness. It was the rift in the lute, it was the beginning of a crevasse that would widen and widen until it for ever separated them.

Married life had only just begun with her, yet, nevertheless, its yoke was already galling, and between her and the sunshine of her happiness dark clouds were drifting. She was at first disposed to tell her husband there and then of what had passed between her and Mosse, but on second thoughts she decided to withhold the information until the morning. When he kissed her goodnight she did not return his kiss, and betrayed unconsciously that there was something

wrong. He noticed this, as he could not fail to do, and exclaimed—

“Hullo, Bertha ! What’s the matter ? What has put you out ?”

Tears rushed to her eyes, but she managed by an effort to control herself, and answered—

“Much ; but go to bed now. I will tell you in the morning.”

She saw the colour suddenly fade from his face, and his lightness of spirits vanished as if by magic.

“What is it ?” he gasped, hoarsely. “Has something gone wrong ?”

“Yes, but don’t ask me now. I cannot and will not tell you.”

A cold perspiration came over him, for he was alarmed and startled. He pressed her to tell him what it was that had caused this change in her, but the more he persisted the more determined and obstinate she became, until, with an expression of disgust, he left her and went sullenly to his bed.

She passed a wretched and restless night, and often during the dreary hours her thoughts reverted to Joseph Courrette, until she imagined that he stood before her, and in tones of sorrow and reproach said—

“You have sacrificed your happiness and peace on the altar of vanity and pride.”

When the morning came she was thoroughly out of sorts, and felt so depressed and unhappy that she resolved, before telling her husband what had occurred, that she would go and see her mother, and take her advice. The Count had not yet risen, so she gave orders that the carriage was to be prepared, and having made a hurried toilet, she drove to Beau Séjour. Frau Schmidt’s surprise at seeing her daughter at such an early hour may be better imagined than described, and she exclaimed in alarm—

“What is the matter ? Have you quarrelled with the Count ?”

Without concealing a single item Bertha related to her mother all that had taken place the previous day during her interview with Mosse.

Contrary to Bertha's expectation her mother laughed and treated the matter with what seemed to the daughter unbecoming lightness.

"I don't see, child," she said, "that this little incident, disagreeable as it is, need be allowed to disturb your equanimity to the extent that it evidently has done. You see you are a mere child after all, and very inexperienced in the ways of the world. Your husband is young, and there is no doubt that in his bachelor days he has been a little wild. But, God bless my life, a gambling debt is not such a terrible crime after all. Do not all young men gamble more or less excepting in England, where I am told all the young men are saints and all the young women angels, or at any rate they themselves think so. The thirty thousand francs you speak of is a large sum, but still it must be paid, and this odious Mosse got rid of. But, first of all, I will see the Count and give him a lecture. It is well that he should be made to understand that we have not got a magician's wand for conjuring money by sackfuls, and that a limit must be put to his extravagance. I will go back to the Chateau with you, for it is as well this ugly bit of business should be settled at once."

Bertha offered no opposition to this project, but she felt somehow as if she had asked her mother for bread and had received a stone. She had expected sympathy and had practically been ridiculed, and this by no means served to restore her respect for her husband.

When the Frau and her daughter got to the Chateau the Count and Rudolph Mosse, having had their coffee, were enjoying their morning cigarette in the veranda.

The Frau's appearance was a surprise for the Count, as the disappearance of his wife had been. For he had inquired about her, and had learned from her maid that she had

gone out. Mosse was no less surprised ; in fact, it was in the nature of a revelation to him, for he had not been informed of the absence of the Countess.

The Frau recognized Mosse with a very cold and stately movement of her head, and then turning to her son-in-law she said—

“Count, if your friend can spare you for a short time, I have some private business to transact with you.”

The two men exchanged glances. The Count's was a glance of inquiry, for he was entirely ignorant of what had taken place on the previous day. But Mosse looked at the other to try and learn something of what was passing in his mind.

The Count fell into a state of obvious confusion, and first he went red in the face and then pale, but striving desperately hard to appear indifferent, he exclaimed—

“Of course, I am at your service, maman.”

He led the way to an inner room, and as they went Mosse seized a chance to hurriedly whisper to Bertha—

“You had better perhaps not tell your husband that I was in your boudoir yesterday. It may cause unpleasantness.”

She made no answer, but gave him a look of withering disdain, and then followed her mother and her husband.

“I understand, Count,” began the Frau, “that this *gentleman*, this Herr Rudolph Mosse has a claim against you for the sum of thirty thousand francs for a gambling debt?”

The Count turned deadly pale ; as white as the spotless handkerchief that projected so obtrusively from the breast-pocket of his tightly-fitting velveteen coat, and in a voice rendered unsteady by agitation, he cried—

“This is infamous and false.”

“What !” exclaimed the Frau amazed. “Do you mean to say that this man Mosse whom you have received under your roof, and with whom you have entrusted your wife is a liar ?”

"Well, no, no, not exactly that," he answered, growing more and more confused. Then turning suddenly to his wife, he demanded in a peremptory tone—"How did you learn this? Did Mosse tell you yesterday?"

"Yes. He had the audacity to come to my private sitting-room, in order that he might give me this very pleasant piece of information."

The Count drew out the white pocket-handkerchief alluded to, and wiped his face, not that there was any absolute necessity for so doing, but he was excited, and he did the thing mechanically as men will do such things when they are suddenly taken off their guard and lose their presence of mind.

"Mosse is a rascal," he gasped hoarsely.

"I set him down as something even worse than that," remarked the Countess, with a scornful toss of her head.

"Well, it is no use our having a scene," interposed the Frau. "The thing is do you, or do you not, owe this man thirty thousand francs, Count?"

Thus driven into a corner by the pointed question that only admitted of one of two answers, he stuttered out—

"Yes; well, that is, I don't think it's quite so much, but before I say anything more I should like to talk to Mosse."

"If you really owe him the money," said the Frau, sharply, "pay him and have done with it, and send him from your house immediately, if you do not wish that the fair fame and honour of your wife should be compromised by the breath of scandal. I will procure the money for you in the course of the day, so that there may no longer be the shadow of an excuse for his remaining."

The Count appeared crestfallen and foolish. He knew his position, and knew that he could offer no single word in palliation. And here the Frau showed that she was not without a large measure of common sense when occasion required, for she remarked—

"It's no use prolonging this interview. The mischief's

done. It's one of your follies that I can overlook, as I am sure your wife will. But, Count"—she said this very pointedly—"let it be a warning to you. Remember, my family bears an honoured name in Zurich; and, at the same time, do not forget that we have not the purse of Fortunatus. There must be a line drawn and some limit to the expenditure."

"You have been exceedingly kind, and——" he commenced to stammer, but the Frau cut him short by saying—

"No remark of that kind is necessary. Profit by what I have said. That is all I ask of you." She kissed him and kissed her daughter, and telling them that they need not see her to the door, she left them hurriedly and drove home.

The Count felt very awkward, and, turning to his wife, said—

"I am really very sorry that this has occurred."

"I daresay you are," she answered. "It is a pity you have deceived me. Had you told me or my mother of this before our marriage it could have been settled, and I should have been spared the agony and insult of yesterday."

"Are you angry with me?" he asked.

"Yes, a little," she said. "But get that man out of the house as soon as possible, and then I shall feel more able to talk to you, and more inclined to forgive you."

Before he could make reply or stop her she turned round and left the room, and he stood there biting his lip with vexation and wounded pride. He stood in a thoughtful attitude for some time, and his face indicated how troubled he was. Then he stamped his foot in rage, and muttered—

"This is cursed bad piece of business. I must try if possible to smoothe the matter over."

He went to Mosse, who was indolently smoking a cigarette and reclining in luxurious ease in a large sofa chair on the glass-covered veranda. Without waiting for him to speak Mosse observed with provoking coolness—

"There has been a scene, has there not?"

The Count was almost livid with rage, and shaking his fist in the other's face, he exclaimed—

"You devil! What is this you have done? Have you made up your mind to ruin me?"

"Be more choice in your language, my good friend," answered Mosse, without changing his position, and still smoking his cigarette. "I have no wish to ruin you, but you don't suppose I am going to see you get all the plums, while I haven't the wherewithal to pay for my coffee in the morning. I may be a devil, as you say, but if so, there are a pair of us, and I should be disposed to say you are the more devilish devil of the two."

The Count walked up and down two or three times in great agitation. Then he stopped suddenly and said—"Look here, my mother-in-law is going to give you this thirty thousand francs you ask for. Is that to be the final payment?"

"You must think that I am a poor fool if you imagine such a thing," returned Mosse. "No, it is not going to stop there. You have dropped into prosperity, and I intend to enjoy some of it with you."

"Rudolph Mosse," exclaimed the Count, hissing the words out with savage passion, "don't you make life a hell to me, so that it becomes unendurable, for I shall do away with it, but not before I have scattered your brains. So have a care, and do not exasperate me too far."

Still preserving his cool demeanour, and without rising from his seat, Mosse answered—"You seem to have become a very important personage all of a sudden, and your language and manner are commensurate with your importance. But your bluster doesn't frighten me, and your threats I despise. You are too big a coward to kill yourself, and if you talk of killing me, I'll make you acquainted with the inside of a prison."

The Count put his hands to his head in an agony of distress, and he clutched his hair with his fingers as if he was going to tear it out by the roots.

"Listen, Mosse," he said at last. "I have no desire to quarrel with you, but you must have some pity upon me. The thirty thousand francs you shall have to-day; but you must leave the house—leave at once."

"No, I am not going to be ordered out," said the other. "The quarters are too comfortable; and, though I may preach the doctrines of Socialism, I'll be hanged if I am going to practice them."

"I am not ordering you," cried the Count, "I am appealing to you—begging and praying of you—and you must heed me. As long as I have got anything you shall share it with me, but you must leave me alone—you must leave me in peace. You must be a stranger to me."

Mosse rose up now, and as he tossed the burnt-up end of his cigarette away he said—

"What guarantee have I that you will keep your word?"

"If I fail to keep it you can always reappear."

"True; but I confess I like the quarters, and I feel reluctant to go."

"You must go. You know as well as I do how much depends upon it. As it is, you have done irreparable mischief. Do not be fool enough to kill the goose with the golden eggs."

"Well, there's something in what you say; but still I don't like to be driven out like a dog—at any rate, I shall not go to-day. I'll sleep upon it. You know that if, in the first instance, when I came you had got me this money I should have gone. But you told me that it was impossible at present—that you had drawn all the money you could get for the time being. Well, I believed that, and, being in comfortable quarters, I was content to wait. But yesterday, as you were away, it suddenly struck me that I could get some money; and besides, I am rather smitten with that woman of yours."

The Count turned upon his torturer like a lion at bay, and, springing at him, he seized him roughly by the throat.

What the consequences of this encounter might have been it is difficult to say, had not Bertha suddenly appeared on the scene. Two massive purple curtains screened the doorway that gave access to the salon, and she came from behind these curtains, and the reason she was there was this. After leaving her husband, she felt very unhappy, thinking that she had spoken too harshly to him, and she turned back to salve his wounded feelings with a kiss, but finding he had gone out to the veranda, she went into the salon intending to call him, when certain words uttered by him to Mosse caused her to pause and listen, and she heard much that had passed. And now as she so unexpectedly came on the scene, she was white as a ghost, and, under the influence of intense suppressed excitement, she trembled in every limb.

"Count, husband," she exclaimed peremptorily, "for my sake leave that man alone."

Like one who had been whipped, the Count shrunk back, while Mosse shook himself and straightened his collar. Then addressing him, the Countess said—

"Sir, I know not who you are, nor what you are, save that you are a villain. But I wish you to understand this distinctly. The Chateau is mine. I am its absolute mistress and owner, and therefore I command you, and order you to leave it."

Mosse's coolness had left him, and his face was scarlet. He flourished his fist menacingly at the Count, and exclaimed—

"Yes, madame, I will go in due time. But the thirty thousand francs I was to receive I won't accept now. My price is a hundred thousand, and I'll budge never an inch till I get it."

Bertha uttered a cry, and seemed as if she was going to faint, so that her husband caught her suddenly in his arms, and carried her into the salon. But she freed herself from him, and drawing herself up and looking at him sternly, she said—

"There is some mystery and some rascality here, and until you have explained it all to me I'll be wife to you no longer."

Then she left him standing there as if he had suddenly been transformed to stone.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BLOW.

THE Count stood for some moments perfectly motionless, until aroused by a heavy hand being laid on his shoulder. He turned and faced Mosse, who was pale now and agitated.

"My worthy Count," he said with a sneer, "you have insulted me, and I will make you pay dearly for it."

"Are you mad?" asked the Count hoarsely.

"No. I never was more sane in my life."

"Then why do you act like a madman? Do you wish to ruin me?" asked the Count, in an appealing tone.

"I mean to ruin you," answered Mosse cold-bloodedly, "unless you comply with my demands."

"If your demand for a hundred thousand francs is persisted in," said the Count with a despairing sigh, "you may rest assured it will not be complied with."

"Then, on your side, you may rest assured that I will crush you."

"What have I done to you to deserve such animosity?" cried the Count.

"Done! Why, you have tried to throttle me, and a man doesn't generally feel particularly amiable towards his would-be assassin."

"You stung me into forgetfulness of myself by your reference to the Countess, and I was scarcely responsible for my act. Forgive me. Be generous for once in your life. Accept the thirty thousand francs. Go away, leave

me in peace, and believe that I will not neglect you in the future."

A saturnine smile spread itself over Mosse's fat face. He had recovered his self-possession and was cool again. He drew his cigarette case from his breast-pocket and offered the Count a smoke. But his mind was occupied with more weighty matters than smoke, and he rejected the offer. So Mosse took one himself and lighted it before he answered. Then, as he ejected a stream of smoke down his nostrils, he said slowly—

"This matter wants deliberation, and I'll think it over. The thirty thousand is to be paid to-day, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll cogitate a bit, but mark this, my sweet youth, should it come about that I go from my word and accept the thirty thousand, and you are sufficiently well acquainted with me to know that when once I have said a thing I stick to it, you may make up your mind I shall stick to you. If you have opened out a gold mine I am going to share it with you. We are partners in this affair, and I swear to God that if you attempt to shake me off the concern shall be dissolved."

The Count sank into a chair, and covering his face with his hands he uttered a despairing groan.

"Well, upon my soul, I declare you are an infinitely greater fool than I imagined," said Mosse contemptuously. "Did you suppose for a moment that as soon as I came to know of this stroke of luck of yours I was going to allow you to enjoy it all alone."

"No; I thought nothing of the kind," returned the wretched Count, with another groan, "but I thought you were dead, or failing that, that you had lost all trace of me."

Mosse laughed coarsely as he exclaimed—

"How loving you are, my Count. You thought me dead, and hoped so. Eh? Well, you see you have made another mistake. Your whole life has been a mistake, you know.

In the present instance your light was not to be hidden under a bushel—at any rate, so far as I was concerned—and, as you have chosen your course, you cannot be so unreasonable as to suppose that I should not take advantage of your rascality.”

The Count looked up suddenly with an angry flash in his eyes.

“Oh, you don’t like the word?” said Mosse scornfully. “Well, I suppose it’s in accordance with human nature that rascals don’t like to be told that they are rascals. But, at any rate, you wouldn’t like me to call you a saint. Because, if I did, I should be a liar. Your title is a bit of very thin veneer, and it only needs to be slightly scratched to show that you are no better than you ought to be.”

The Count groaned again. These probes and thrusts evidently tortured him. He rose at last—sprang up suddenly to his feet—and in a husky, half-choked voice said—

“Spare me your gibes and jeers. We’ll drift to perdition together if you like, but at least you should have the common sense to see that by making exorbitant and unreasonable demands you are rendering everything impossible, and you will only end by doing yourself out of a good thing, and ruining me.”

“Well, there is something in what you say,” Mosse returned, “and I’ll think the matter over.”

“Will you take the thirty thousand, and leave the house to-day?” demanded the Count.

Mosse tapped his forehead with his finger in a thoughtful way, and after some reflection answered—

“Yes, I will.”

The Count breathed a sigh of relief, and said quickly—

“Good. The money shall be paid to you, and I will try to make some arrangement that will satisfy you for the future.”

As there was nothing more to say he left him, and went straight to his wife’s room. He found her weeping bitterly,

and, throwing himself at her feet, he clasped her hands, and exclaimed—

“Bertha, forgive me for the misery I have caused you. Have pity upon me, for I am stricken to the heart, and tortured beyond the expression of words.”

She pushed him away angrily, and asked—

“Who is this man Mosse, and what is the power he holds over you? Remember I am your wife, and I have a right to be in your confidence. Unless there is some very dreadful secret between you and him you should not hesitate to tell me all. Deception can gain you nothing, while frankness may knit us together again. At any rate, until you have cleared up the mystery, I will keep my word, and be wife to you only in name.”

He seemed overwhelmed with confusion, and bit his nails in puzzled distraction. Then he turned to her, and, assuming a somewhat commanding tone and the air of one who felt as if he had been wronged, he said—

“Bertha, you are pretty hard upon me, and perhaps I deserve it. I ought to have told you when Mosse first came here what the relations were between us. In my military days I was a little reckless, and perhaps wild. I used to play cards a good deal, I am sorry to say, and this man lent me money at exorbitant interest. I left Mayence in his debt, and as he has got to know that I have married well, I suppose he thinks to blackmail me by threatening to expose some of the follies of my youth. There, are you satisfied?”

“Is that all?” she asked, looking at him incredulously.

“Yes,” he answered, but betraying guilt of conscience by his manner.

The interview was interrupted by the entrance of a servant with a note addressed to the Count. He opened and read it.

“This is from *maman*,” he said. “She asks me to go at once to Beau Séjour, and receive the thirty thousand francs, as she has nobody at present she can send with it.”

"But what about Mosse?" the Countess asked.

"He has consented to accept the amount and leave."

"Where is he now?"

"I left him on the veranda."

"Go round to maman at once," she said, "and hurry back."

He was only too glad of the excuse to get away, but before leaving the room he wanted to kiss her. She repelled him, however, saying—

"No, not yet. The breach is not quite closed between us."

He seemed surprised and chagrined, but, shrugging his shoulders and bowing, he said—

"Very well, as you will, Bertha. *Au revoir.*"

A few minutes later she went to her window, and saw him going down the carriage-drive. She watched him until he had passed out of the gateway, and had proceeded along the high road until a bend hid him from her view. Then she went to her glass, straightened her hair, and wiped her face, and, throwing a lace shawl over her head, she went to the veranda. Mosse expressed surprise at seeing her, and his eyes flamed up as he gazed on her beauty, for beautiful she really was.

He rose from his seat, and offered her a chair. She did not accept it; did not thank him, but, drawing a little away, said—

"Herr Mosse, I have come with a definite purpose. My husband has gone out, and, taking advantage of his absence, I have come to ask you what there is between you and him?"

"Nothing very serious, my dear," Mosse answered with a leering smile.

"Address me with respect, sir," she answered angrily. "And if it is nothing very serious, as you say, then you have tried to bully us into subjection. If he really owes you thirty thousand francs—and I am charitable enough to suppose that you and he speak the truth on the subject—you shall

be paid, and when you have got your money you must leave here instantly, and I shall hope never to see your face again."

"Well, you are at least candid," said Mosse, "but if you'll permit me I'll make this remark—it's hardly worth your while to make an enemy of me. I have spoken lightly of the connection between me and the Count, but, after all, it is not a very light matter. I could if I chose tell you something that would startle you, but you know you cannot expect to get much out of me if you treat me with such an utter want of respect."

"You are a devil!" exclaimed Bertha, allowing her feelings to overcome her, and scowling at him with disgust and anger.

"You are a beautiful witch!" he cried, and with a sudden and agile movement he caught her in his arms and kissed her.

She uttered a shrill scream, and two of the domestics ran in to see what was the matter.

The Countess twisted herself free from Mosse. Her face was brilliantly scarlet with anger, and her eyes were filled with fire.

"You filthy dog!" she exclaimed with passion. Then, turning to the surprised servants, she said, "Summon the coachman and gardener here, that this insufferable black-guard may be turned out."

"Stay," said Mosse sharply. "If you do that you'll curse the day you were born. I'll crush and break your pride in a manner that will astonish you, and you'll never again be able to hold up your head."

The man's words startled her. They seemed to her ominous. She felt frightened of him, for the idea forced itself upon her that he was possessed of some knowledge in connection with her husband that it would be more than unpleasant to have made public.

"I'll leave my husband to deal with you," she remarked, "but I won't contaminate myself by remaining in your presence another moment."

She hastily withdrew, making a motion to the servants to follow her. Mosse seemed rather disconcerted.

"So, so, my pretty fiend," he muttered angrily. "I am a filthy dog, am I? Well, I'll take some of that starchy pride out of you before I have finished with you, just as sure as you have got a head on your shoulders."

About three hours later the Count returned. He found his wife greatly agitated and distressed, and without any reservation she told him all that had happened, concluding by saying—

"If you are a man, if you have any respect for your own honour and for me, you will horsewhip him and kick him out of the house. At any rate, unless you prove to me that you are not his slave, and not in abject fear of him, I will return to my mother's house, and I will drown myself rather than live with you again."

The Count was dumbfounded by her determination and unusual anger. He tried to reason with her, but she would not listen to him. She taunted him with being afraid of Mosse; with having sold himself to him body and soul. Under these taunts he grew desperate and furious. Then he went to his room and seized his riding-whip, and sallied forth in search of his persecutor. He found him on his favourite lounge on the veranda. The Count drew from his pocket a roll of notes amounting to thirty thousand francs. He threw this roll in Mosse's face, and flourished the whip over his head in an excited manner.

"What's the meaning of this?" asked Mosse, displaying some slight alarm.

"It means that I will kill you rather than be persecuted by you, or allow the Countess to be subject to your insults."

"The Countess!" sneered Mosse with a scornful laugh, as he stooped, picked up the roll of notes, and placed it in his pocket.

Losing all control of himself, and maddened by the sneer,

the Count dealt Mosse a violent blow with his whip across the face, raising an oblique livid wheal.

Mosse was startled and staggered, and his face assumed the hue of pipeclay, while his under lip quivered as if acted upon by electricity. When he had recovered himself a little he hissed fiercely—

“You idiot! This blow shall cost you dearly. By the living God in heaven, I’ll utterly ruin you. You have made an enemy of me, and not all the money you can command shall purchase my friendship.”

He hurried away. The whip had fallen from the Count’s hand. He seemed dazed and stupefied. In a few moments his wife appeared. Her presence seemed to recall him to his senses, and with a passionate wail of despair he threw himself prone on the couch, and, burying his face in his arms, wept.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SEAL OF FAITH.

THE scene shifts once more, and we go back to Russia, for between those who figure there in this narrative and those we have just left in Zurich there is a strong link, as will be presently disclosed.

Although the sentence on Joseph Courrette had been fully anticipated by Rebecca Cohen, it nevertheless came as a shock to her, and she pitied him from the very depths of her being. Through her father's influence with the Nihilists she got a few lines of condolence secretly conveyed to Joseph in his prison, and by the same means he was enabled to send her a note and an enclosure for his mother and father. To her he simply said—

"Farewell. Forget me."

And in another line at the bottom of the page he asked her to enclose the letter to his parents in an envelope and address it to them. He took this precaution because his handwriting might have been recognized at the post and the letter stopped, with the result that his father and mother would probably have fallen under the suspicion of the authorities, and their lives be rendered intolerable thereby. As the letter was open, Rebecca read it, as she resolved to write to them also, and, while condoling with them, hold out some hope that their son would return. His letter was very short, and ran as follows :



"MY DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,—As this is the last opportunity I may ever have of writing to you, I cannot let it slip without craving your blessing and forgiveness. I know what pain I have caused you, and wish that you had not had so unworthy a son. If it were possible you could forget me, I would beg that you would do so ; but I know full well that while you live you will never do that. I have identified myself with the Nihilists' cause ; I have been detected, condemned, and when you receive this shall be on my way to Siberia. So ends my dream ! The causes that have led to my fall you know, and the last request I would make to you is that you will take some means of letting Bertha Schmidt know that the man who worshipped her she has driven a broken-hearted prisoner into the living death of Siberia. Forgive me, and forget me. I am dead though living. Farewell !"

As Rebecca read this she seemed to grow faint, and she put one hand to her head, while the other hung listlessly at her side. Her eyes closed, and the quivering lids indicated that she was suffering from strong emotion. But suddenly by an effort she aroused herself, and murmured—

"I see it all, now. He loved this Bertha Schmidt, whoever she may be. She deceived him and he grew reckless. He came to love me, but I could be nothing to him. Poor fellow ! Poor fellow ! If it is possible to save him he shall be saved." She refolded his letter to his parents and put it into an envelope together with a few lines of her own. This is what she said—

"It is not my pleasure to know you, but I know your unfortunate son and respect and admire him. His nobility of character and largeness of heart should have earned him a better fate. But hope is not altogether dead. He may yet return to you, and I who write these lines bid you not despair."

She sent the letter off, and then spent many hours of

agony of mind in trying to come to some decision with reference to the paper Kalnoky wished her to sign. She dare not take counsel with her father, for she felt perfectly sure he would never consent to her putting her signature to a document of so compromising a character, and which might be turned into such a deadly weapon to be used against them ; not even though it was to save Joseph Courrette. Therefore all the weighty responsibility was on her shoulders.

It was a truly trying situation for a woman to be placed in ; for it was certain that she must deceive Kalnoky if Joseph was to be saved. If she committed herself to that paper she would be absolutely in the hands of Kalnoky, and how was she to avoid the consequences of her act ?

She could not make up her mind either one way or the other, and at last in her distress determined to make one more appeal to Kalnoky. She lost no time in seeing him, and in earnest, almost impassioned language, she prayed him to aid her, and yet not exact from her such a dangerous confession as that he sought to do.

He listened to her patiently, in fact with provoking silence until she had exhausted her subject. Then he pointedly asked—

“Rebecca, how is it you are so anxious to rescue Joseph Courrette from his doom ? ”

The question perplexed her, but she made the best answer she could, and said—

“Because I take more than an ordinary interest in him ; I have told you that often before.”

“You love him,” said Kalnoky quickly.

She hesitated how to respond, but after a struggle with herself, said—

“I have already told you that I can be nothing to him. There is a barrier that prevents it. What that barrier is you need not seek to know, though you can believe me that it exists. But Courrette came here in our charge. He has a mother and father in Zurich ; he has many noble qualities ;

I have come to regard him as a brother. As a sister I bear him affection, and on these grounds I would save him."

Kalnoky smiled grimly and answered—

"You are a strange young woman. Either you think I am very credulous, or you are easily deceiving yourself. You love Joseph Courrette. I love you, and though you speak of a barrier, Courrette stands in the light of my rival. There may be men in the world of such magnanimous dispositions that they will sacrifice themselves to save their rivals and their enemies, but I freely confess I am not one of them. Now tell me why should I save my rival?"

"Because I ask you," she answered in distress, while her eyes filled with tears.

"That is truly a woman's reason," he returned, "but I should like to know what my reward will be?"

"The thanks of a grateful heart," she answered.

"That is but poor pay after all."

"Then supposing I promise to give you something more substantial?" she exclaimed. "Supposing I say you shall be well paid in money."

"I should reject your offer with scorn," he answered quickly, to her great astonishment. "I have ample means and crave not for wealth. It is you I want. This will seem strange to you no doubt, but such is the truth. I may not get you, but I could not bear to see another win you."

"I have already told you that a barrier exists which for the present effectually prevents my bestowing my hand upon any man!" she exclaimed with some warmth.

"Yes, you have already told me so, and yet you confess to loving Courrette, and you have even encouraged me to hope by telling me that if I set him free I may call you mine. Am I to take that as mere words?"

"I confess to having affection for Courrette," she said, without answering his question.

"Well, put it that way if you like, and for the sake of that affection you are prepared to move heaven and earth to

try and get him free. If he were free he might break down the barrier you allude to, where I fail, and I should be in the position of the cat that pulled the chestnuts out of the fire for the monkey's use."

She was exasperated by his stubbornness and resolution, and losing her temper cried—

"So be it. Let Joseph Courrette go. Any way he cannot be saved, for now I do not believe you have the slightest power to save him."

"There you are wrong," he said, quietly. "I have the power."

"I don't believe you," she answered, snappishly and sneeringly.

"That is your own affair," he replied, with provoking calmness, "and you can remain in the belief if it so pleases you. Let Joseph Courrette go as you say, and still I shall hope to find favour in your eyes. For, remember, if I like to use the knowledge I possess I can send you and your father to Siberia. But I solemnly swear that no word shall ever pass my lips. You are safe absolutely as far as I am concerned. I kept silent for a long time nursing my admiration for you, and saying nothing. That silence would have remained unbroken had Joseph Courrette not come on the scene, and had I not seen that he was succeeding where I failed."

Rebecca could not help being touched by these words, nor could she be blind to the facts as he represented them. She could not love this man, but at least she felt now that she could not altogether hate him. For he was not commonplace. He was not spiteful and revengeful, so far as she could judge, and she was only too well aware that he held her and her father's fate in his hand, and yet he had vowed to be silent.

"Will you answer me a question?" she asked, displaying the anxiety she really felt.

"If I can do so I will," he said.

"Tell me then what are the means you would use to free Courrette?"

He hesitated some moments before he answered. Then—

"Yes, I will tell you, for it is better that you and I should come to a clearer understanding. We are not children and should not act as children. I have a half-brother, who is a captain in the special guard which is appointed to convey prisoners to Siberia. My brother has already made three journeys to that country, and as it so happens his turn to go again has now come round, so that he will accompany this fresh batch of prisoners."

Rebecca caught her breath with the excitement she felt as the new light dawned upon her, and she exclaimed quickly—

"But surely your half-brother would not run the tremendous risk for a strange man in whom he has no earthly interest?"

"My brother would do as I desired him," answered Kalnok in his deliberate way.

"Then he must be very much under your subjection," Rebecca remarked, with an incredulous look on her face.

"He is in my power," was the answer. "I happen to be in possession of a secret in connection with his career, by which I could consign him to a prison for life, if not to the scaffold. I have never asked him any favour before; but I haven't a doubt that at my request he will, if it is at all possible, give Courrette the means of escaping."¹

¹ Lest the reader should think this situation too strained I may be permitted to say that prisoners condemned to Siberia are deported in batches under the care of a special military guard, the leader of which is invariably styled captain. A large portion of the journey is performed on foot through as desolate and sterile a country as the world can furnish. In these bleak wildernesses, winter reigns for nine months out of the year, and many hundreds of miles of the route run through deadly solitudes infested with rapacious wolves, and only broken every thirty miles or so, by what are known as *étapes*, or exile station houses, in each of which a small garrison of about a dozen men is stationed. The wretched prisoners, men and women, are


Rebecca heard Kalnoky's statement with quickened pulse, and forgetting for the moment the risk she was running, and how completely she was placing herself in the hands of Kalnoky, and thinking only of Joseph, she said—

“I will sign that paper.”

“Good,” he answered, displaying now some little excitement. “In addition you will have to furnish me with two thousand roubles.” *

marched along chained together, and every mile that they go can only serve to increase the awfulness of their despair as they realize the utter desolation of the ghastly country through which they pass, and the almost impossibility of supporting life in it even assuming that they could escape. Many sink under their sufferings, and are left in the snow as food for the ravening wolves, while those who do reach their destination are prematurely aged and broken down. Escape, in view of the conditions I have named, may at the first sight seem out of the question, but, nevertheless, it is a fact that nearly twenty-five per cent. of the prisoners do effect their escape, but it is almost invariably by way of Turkestan and Persia; and in spite of all sorts of pressure brought to bear on these countries by Russia, they have up to the present persistently refused to enter into any extradition treaty whereby fugitives could be reclaimed. The reason of this may be explained. Most of those who escape are either members of wealthy families or are aided by the Nihilists, who have agents in both countries. Bribery is lavishly resorted to, and the poorly paid Governors of the different Siberian provinces and the officials in charge, will readily shut their eyes if large bribes are forthcoming. And so, by means of agents in Turkestan and Persia, who in turn have other agents in Siberia itself, many a prisoner regains his freedom. It is said that not a few of these agents have high rank and great influence with their respective Governments. And any one who knows the corruption that prevails amongst all classes of Asiatics will not be surprised therefore at the aid that is rendered to the fugitives. If payment is forthcoming a chance for the prisoner's escape will be made. Of course it does not follow that those who do escape always succeed in getting clear. Some are retaken, some shot down, and others perish by the way, for a large track of inhospitable country has to be traversed before either Persian or Turkestan territory can be reached. Only quite recently the Nihilists in Lugano in the Swiss Canton of Tessin, received news that nineteen prisoners, including two women, had escaped from Siberia, and safely reached Persia. Several of them were the friends and relations of the Lugano Nihilists. Hence the interest felt in their escape.—*The Author.*

* The rouble is worth nominally about three shillings.



"That is a large sum," she answered.

"Yes ; but you forget what has to be done for it."

"You shall have it," she remarked, after a pause.

"Have you the paper with you ?" he asked.

"Yes."

He dipped the pen in the ink, and handing it to her, said—

"Sign it at once and it's done with."

With trembling hands she drew the dangerous document from her pocket, and seizing the pen signed her name rapidly, as though she thought that if she hesitated she would change her mind. Then tossing the paper to him she remarked—

"There, I am in your power now. What the end will be Heaven only knows."

He coolly passed a blotting pad over the wet signature, and folding the paper up placed it in his pocket. Then he went to her, and taking her hands, kissed her on the lips, and she made no resistance.


"That kiss," he said with some solemnity, "is the seal of faith between us. I will be true to you so long as you are true to me."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

REBECCA'S SECRET.

FIVE minutes after Rebecca Cohen had placed that dangerous document in Kalnoky's possession she deeply regretted it, and could she have done so she would have reclaimed it. But the following day, when she learned that the prisoners, of whom Joseph Courrette was one, had started on their terrible journey to Siberia, she was more reconciled, for, though she might never see Courrette again, and it seemed highly probable that she never would, she was intensely desirous of saving him. As regards her future relations with Kalnoky, that was a subject that necessarily caused her considerable anxiety, for the determined manner in which he had pursued Courrette to his fall proved that he was not likely to abandon any project upon which he had set his mind. No doubt Kalnoky himself deemed it unlikely that his rival and Rebecca would meet again, for, though Courrette should effect his escape, it was certain that he would never more set his foot in Russia. But the paper Kalnoky had exacted from Rebecca gave him a power over her, and the question was how would he use that power? That question was calculated to cause her inquietude, but in the course of a few days she came to the very wise determination not to meet trouble halfway, but to wait patiently the course of events, in the hope that those events would prove favourable to her.

It has already been stated that Kalnoky was a singularly silent and reserved man. He never expressed his views, and



never discussed his plans and aims with any one, and knowing this fact, Rebecca had no fear that the secret between them would become known to any one else, at any rate for the present. His conduct towards her was scarcely different to what it was before they had entered into their compact, though she saw that he placed himself in her way a little more frequently, and when an opportunity occurred to be alone with her for a short time he was less reserved than formerly, and displayed his feelings more. It became more and more evident that he was enamoured with her. It might be called infatuation or passion, but give it what name one would, he regarded her as he regarded no other woman, and he was prepared to resort to almost any means to possess her.

Weeks drifted away, during which things in the Cohen household went on much as usual. Solomon had become more watchful and cautious since Joseph's arrest, and although he did not say anything, strong distrust of Kalnoky began to take possession of him. Of course he was in entire ignorance of the compact that existed between his daughter and Kalnoky. Had he been aware of this he would have regulated his actions accordingly. As it was, now the belief forced itself upon him that Kalnoky was a spy, and this belief naturally begot bitterness and dislike. He watched Kalnoky for some time with the result that his suspicions seemed to be confirmed, though, had he not been suspicious, the chances are he would have noted nothing out of the ordinary.

"Kalnoky is a standing menace to us, and I'll get rid of him," he thought, and so one day he told him that as he was thinking of reducing the expenses of his establishment, he would not require his services any longer.

For a moment Kalnoky seemed surprised and even angered. But in a very few moments he said with a smile full of meaning—

"Very well, that is your affair, and as I am only your servant at present I must do as you desire."

Later on he went to Rebecca, and said—

"Rebecca, I am going away. Your father does not require me any longer."

She exhibited her surprise and even alarm by the start she gave and the paleness that came over her face, for her first thought was that there had been a quarrel between her father and Kalnoky.

"What is the cause of this?" she asked, betraying her uneasiness.

"I don't know. Perhaps you do," he remarked pointedly.

"On my soul I do not," she exclaimed with great earnestness.

"I believe you," he answered. "You need make no remark to your father. I will go. But, Rebecca, do not think I shall lose sight of you. You are bound to me, and the bond cannot be severed. Our destinies are woven together, and it is useless our trying to go in contrary directions."

She felt very uneasy, for there could be no mistaking what he meant. But how could she answer him, what could she do? She knew that she was in his power, and she couldn't resist him. She had heard nothing at all about Joseph since his departure, and Kalnoky had told her that some considerable time would elapse before news could be received. She put the question point blank to him now—

"Do you think Courrette will regain his liberty?"

"Yes, I do."

"When?"

"It is impossible to say exactly, but very likely he is free now. I faithfully carried out my part of the bargain, and I haven't a doubt my half-brother would do his part. Of course, he might fail, but if he does the fault will not be his. Under any circumstances I no longer see any reason why you and I should wait."

"What do you mean?" she asked in alarm.

He smiled sardonically as he answered—

"I mean that you and I can become man and wife."

"Impossible," she gasped, as a spasm of deadly fear caused her blood to grow cold.

"Why impossible?" he demanded, with evident annoyance.

"I told you before, and I tell you again, that it is impossible," she repeated, with emphasis. "I cannot, and even if I could I would not be your wife."

This was an unfortunate remark, and had better been left unsaid. But her indignation had got the better of her judgment, and her thoughts took words before she could stop them, so to speak.

She could not fail to see the change that came over him. His expression gave every indication that he was stung and angered; and never before, during the whole time she had known him, had she seen such fierceness in his eyes.

"Rebecca Cohen," he said, sternly, "you have trifled with me long enough, but the trifling must come to an end. For your sake I have been silent; for your sake I have shut my eyes to things that I knew. I might have brought ruin on your family long ago, but I refrained because I hoped that some day you would look favourably upon me."

"You ought never to have cherished such a hope," she murmured. "From the moment you told me what your feelings were, I gave you to understand that there was a barrier between us, and I could be nothing to you."

"You did tell me that at first," he answered, "and that statement I accepted with a sigh of regret, and should have gone on admiring you in silence. But then came Joseph Courrette. He made love to you. You allowed him to do it, and you favoured him, and since then you have encouraged me."

"It is false, utterly and absolutely false," she cried excitedly. "I told him as I told you, that he could be nothing to me."

"I do not believe it," answered Kalnoky unhesitatingly. She flashed an angry glance at him, but he continued, "I speak my mind, and I repeat that I do not believe it. You

have given too many indications that your heart has gone out to Joseph Courrette. I can brook no rivalry. I do not wish to quarrel with you. On the contrary, I want to win your toleration at least if nothing more. And now I am going to tell you something that will amaze you, and it will serve to show in a far more powerful way than any argument I could use, that I have been faithful to you. I could have brought you and your father within the grasp of the law long ago. I could have utterly ruined you, and have sent you into exile, for I have known for years that your father and you were Nihilists. But I have held my peace; kept silent for your sake, for I wanted to win you. And yet in doing this I have betrayed the confidence reposed in me by the Government."

Rebecca fairly reeled at this announcement, and her face grew ashen. The announcement was a revelation, and it took her breath away. In a few moments she said hoarsely and contemptuously—

"Then you are a spy."

"Yes, if you like to use that term," he answered coolly. "I am one of many hundreds in this great city who receive a Government fee to keep their eyes open."

She had recovered her self-possession, but she was still very pale, and there was something like a look of despair in her face. She saw clearly that she was utterly at his mercy, but it suddenly occurred to her that she could checkmate him, and she exclaimed triumphantly—

"You have played a deep game, and played it well. You have tried to entrap me, but at the same time you have set a trap for yourself, for I can bring a charge against you of being false to your trust inasmuch as you have connived at the escape of a prisoner."

"Of Joseph Courrette you mean," he said with a smile. "But do not deceive yourself. You would not be believed. My position is too strong for any vague charge of the kind to affect me. But really, Rebecca, my desire is not to quarrel

with you. Why should we quarrel? So far I have aided you. So far I have faithfully preserved your secret. You can make me your lifelong friend, your slave. You may not love me now, but you may come to love me later. I feel, and the feeling is deep-rooted, that you are essential to my happiness. I have shown you to what extent I am prepared to go, when for your sake I have used my power to set my rival and enemy free. Give me some hope; pledge me your word that you will be true to me, and the paper I hold I will tear in pieces before your eyes."

She was impressed by his manner. She was even in a measure drawn towards him again, for after all he had much to recommend him. But she felt now that she could no longer deceive him, no longer play with him, and she stammered—

"I have already told you, and I repeat it, that it is impossible that I can give you any hope."

"Why is it impossible?" he demanded with a show of irritability.

She hesitated for a few moments, then with an air of desperateness she exclaimed—

"It is impossible; because *I am already married.*"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THROUGH THE LAND OF DESOLATION.

DURING the time that Joseph Courrette and Strovella were detained in prison they had frequent opportunities of conversing. For political prisoners of this class are not separated, although in other respects they are treated with great harshness, frequently amounting to barbarity. It would be useless to attempt to convey any adequate notion of Courrette's frame of mind when he was condemned and for some time after. The note that was secretly conveyed to him from Rebecca had the effect of temporarily lifting him out of his despondency. But this effect soon passed away, and all hope, all wish to live, all desire of any kind seemed to leave him. In Strovella, however, he found a friend, consoler, and adviser. Strovella was altogether a truly remarkable man, for, besides being possessed of great natural abilities, that, had they been properly applied, might have enabled him to have risen to high place, he had a dauntless heart, while nothing seemed able to crush his spirits. In addition, his honesty of purpose, his enthusiasm, and his staunchness to those he professed friendship for made up a combination of qualities not often found in one individual. He had an abiding and unwavering faith in his own star, and frequently expressed to Courrette the firm belief that he was destined to do great things, and that Siberia was not to be written on the last chapter of his life's history.

When the wretched prisoners set out on their terrible

journey they were divided into three gangs, each destined for different parts of Siberia. The gang which included Courrette and Strovelle was to go as far as the Government of Irkutsk, in the far east of Siberia, while the other two were to be left in other Governments on the way.¹

¹ Siberia is divided into "Governments," or provinces, each Government taking its name from the chief towns. There are five of these Governments altogether. Irkutsk is situated at the southern end of Lake Baikal. It is the largest in Siberia, and is only a little less than Lake Superior, in America. From December to the end of April, this enormous lake is entirely frozen over, and much traffic between the various villages is carried on over the ice. The climate is terribly severe; the system of government barbarous; while the people are steeped in ignorance, and have little knowledge of the rest of the world. It is a dreary, desolate, region, where Nature seems to sulk nearly the whole year round. When the wind blows from the north—that is, from the Polar regions—life is almost insupportable out of doors. At such times the cold is so intense that when the door of a house is opened the moist air escaping from the interior is instantly frozen, and falls in a feathery cloud of snow. Irkutsk is one of several convict stations, but only the better class of criminals are sent there. The worst class of desperadoes are sent further north, where few of them are able to withstand the rigours of the climate, and succumb in from one to three years. The mortality amongst all the convicts is very great, owing to the hardships they have to endure. The females have no more leniency shown to them than the men, and very frequently they are subjected to outrages that are too horrible to mention. The dreadful lives the wretched prisoners have to lead, together with the isolation and the hopelessness of their position is a fruitful source of insanity. No mercy is shown to the insane. The sick scarcely receive any attention. The slightest insubordination is punished with the knout, and prisoners are frequently shot by brutal taskmasters. The dead are buried like dogs; and should any of the female convicts give birth to children, as is sometimes the case, the hapless infants are almost invariably put out of the world. Notwithstanding the vigilance that is exercised, there is, as already stated, a large percentage of escapes. The above particulars were communicated to me by a prominent Nihilist, who spent five years in Siberia and effected his escape by way of Mongolia, and endured hardships and perils of an astounding kind before he ultimately reached Western civilization once more. Although he was only thirty-three years of age, so great was the suffering and mental anxiety he had endured that his hair was snow-white, and his face so wrinkled and drawn that he would have passed for a man of sixty.—*The Author.*

As far as the Ural Mountains the journey was not very trying, as part is performed by rail and part by barges towed by steamer. The convicts are first taken to Moscow by rail thence by rail to the celebrated city of Nizhni Novgorod where the line ends. After that there is a journey of nearly a thousand miles by steamer, down the Volga as far as the river Varna up which the steamer sails to Perm. From this place the rail is continued over the Ural Mountains to Ekaterineburg, which is under two hundred miles from the Siberian frontier. At Ekaterineburg commences the great highway to Siberia, and this wonderful road extends for over three thousand miles. After leaving the terminus on the Asiatic side of the Urals the exiles have to march, though delicate women and invalids and infirm of both sexes are carried in rude springless carts. It is said that more than half a million prisoners have travelled this dreary road since the beginning of the century. When the mountains had been crossed, and Siberia gained, desolation began, and with it a corresponding amount of hardship. The Ural Mountains form a physical barrier between Russia in Europe and Russia in Asia. At the Urals the different gangs of prisoners were separated, as their routes lay in different directions. One striking off almost due north, to the region of silence and death; the other north-east; and the third, which included Strovell and Courrette, turning their faces east. This party was under the care of Kalnoky's half-brother, whose name was Orzeski. He was a tall, powerful young man; determined as a bull dog, daring as a lion, and scarcely less reserved than Kalnoky. His constitution seemed to be iron, and his nerves steel. The escort under him was composed of sixteen men, sternly disciplined soldiers, inured to hardship, and apparently utter strangers to compassion. They were all heavily armed, and besides loaded rifle with bayonet fixed, each man was provided with a six-chamber revolver ready for instant use.

Courrette had no idea that Orzeski had been heavily

bribed to give him his liberty. At first setting out he conceived a strong prejudice against Orzeski, and felt as if he would like to kill him, but when they had been on the way a few days this feeling changed, for he became aware that the captain regarded him with a not unkindly feeling. But beyond this nothing passed between them that was calculated to give Courrette the slightest hope. Strovelle was the life of the dejected prisoners. Nothing seemed to daunt him, and he became a general favourite.

When they turned their backs upon the Ural Mountains it was to face a wilderness frozen into stony stillness, for it was the depth of winter. Here the real hardships of the journey began, and before a week had passed two of the unhappy convicts had succumbed, and were left in the snow as food for the wolves. The desolation was awful. The weary eye sought in vain for something to break the monotony of the landscape. Solemn pine forests gave place to vast snow-covered plains, which were succeeded by pine forests again. On the flanks of the party the hungry wolves prowled, and were only kept at bay by occasional volleys from the rifles of the soldiers, which bowled dozens of their numbers over, and their carcasses were instantly torn to pieces by those that escaped the bullets. Sometimes when the north wind blew, progress was impossible. Then a halt was called. A snow wall was reared to windward, a huge fire was made of pine branches, and the convicts were allowed to rest their jaded bodies in its genial warmth. At such times vigilance was relaxed, for it was considered, and in fact, it absolutely was, impossible that any one could have escaped then, for even if he could have guarded himself from the wolves, want of food and the pitiless cold would have slain him. The dietary consisted of frozen beef, which was cut in long strips, and packed in bundles; black bread that had to be chopped in pieces, and copious supplies of tea.¹

¹ This bread is made of coarse rye flour baked very hard. It is almost perfectly black, and will keep good for a year. It is made in flat slabs

As the miserable convicts proceeded farther and farther into this inhospitable land, an awful maddening despair took possession of them, for it seemed to them in those early days of their misery that absolute death would have been ten thousand times more preferable than the living death they were called upon to endure. And one poor fellow, a man of about fifty, felt his position so insupportable that one night, when the party had encamped, he suddenly darted off, and deliberately rushed towards a number of wolves that were prowling about in the pine forests. The gathering darkness favoured his object, and before the guard could recapture him some of the hungry beasts had sprung upon him and mangled him to death. It was perhaps the most original suicide ever committed, and it was ghastly evidence of the unutterable mental agony the unfortunate man suffered.

This sad incident seemed to throw a still deeper gloom over the miserable men, with the exception of Strovell, whose spirits never once drooped. Thus the days went and the nights came, and the night gave place to the day again, but brought no change in the weariness of the journey. There was the same dreary expanse of snow-covered land, the same dark pine trees, looking so like one another that the monotony was dreadful. The arrival at a guard-house sometimes afforded a slight relief, but the men of these little garrisons seemed to have become infected with the stony silence and the dreadful melancholy of the wilderness around them, and apparently were scarcely less despondent than the unhappy prisoners themselves. But how could it be other-
about a yard long and four inches thick for the convenience of carrying. The stock of provisions is occasionally replenished in the different towns or villages through which the convicts pass on the route. The soldiers are generally provided with flasks of *Vodka*. This is a white spirit distilled from rye. The coarse kind of vodka drunk by the common people is exceedingly powerful, and it is almost impossible for any one not used to it to drink it. When taken in small quantities, however, and diluted, it is said to be wholesome and sustaining.—*The Author*

wise in a region where eternal winter reigned, and where there was no promise of awakening life, no ray of dawning hope, where human misery and suffering in their most accentuated aspect were displayed, and where there was never a sound of cheerfulness, never a note of gladness. If Nature can be called unnatural then was there something unnatural, something weird, uncanny, a something that weighed down the spirits of men with a sense of unutterable and never-ending sadness. Every one who was doomed to pass any length of time in those desolate solitudes was seized with a melancholy that, like a cankering fester, corroded the heart and brain until life became merely a mechanical life, in which there was no spirit and no hope.¹

At length, after many days of weary marching the party arrived at Tomsk. This was the first town of any size they had come to. Here the prisoners were lodged in the old guard-house, a block of buildings composed partly of stone and partly of wood. As a halt of two days was to be made here the escort was allowed to disperse about the town, and seek their own amusement such as it was.

The accommodation provided for the prisoners was as poor as it could be. They were stowed in a large square room with bare walls, but without any provision for the diffusion of warmth. Round the walls, some three feet from the ground, was a wooden platform, on which was a supply of exceedingly dirty and fetid straw, and some sheep-skin rugs, that must have covered many generations of men, and which emitted an odour that was offensive in the

¹ It is a well-known fact that men who are doomed to pass their lives in such dreary regions as are most parts of Siberia, become a prey to a strange melancholy. Their faces wear a vacant expression; they sigh unconsciously, and their eyes have a strange far-away gaze, as though the soul had gone out from the body, and the body was yearning to follow it. These remarks do not apply to the southern Siberian towns, where the people live in comfort, and where almost every luxury is to be found. But these towns are oases in the wilderness. The intervening tracts of country are as desolate as can be imagined.—*The Author.*

extreme. In the daytime the place was lighted by a circular window in the roof, that was quite twenty feet from the ground, and at night by means of an earthenware pot, set on an iron bracket fixed in the wall. The pot was filled with mutton tallow, in the midst of which was a thick wick, made of some peculiar kind of rush. When this primitive candle was lighted it gave off a fume and a cloud of greasy smoke that was suffocating, and which made the open air with the bitter cold preferable. A few hours after the prisoners had been stowed in this miserable dungeon, and while they were trying to forget their sufferings in sleep, a soldier entered, and, to the amazement of Courrette, told him that he was to follow him.

Joseph and Strovellé had been lying together for mutual warmth under one of the frowsy skins.

"What does this mean?" asked Joseph in German of his companion, and expressing some anxiety in his tone.


"Nay, I know not," answered Strovellé, no less anxious, for it occurred to him that he and his companion were to be separated. "Go, anyway, and see."

Courrette was silent; but as if impressed with some instinct of coming evil, he warmly pressed the hand of his friend, then arose and followed the soldier, who was a Cossack; a fierce-looking man clad in sheepskins and boots of untanned hide. He was heavily armed, his arms consisting of a long flint-lock gun, a heavy horse-pistol stuck in his belt, and two murderous-looking knives or daggers without any sheath, and at least two feet and a half long in the blade, which was broad and sharp and bright. These knives were also carried in the belt, one to the right and one to the left.

"Where are you going to take me to?" asked Courrette.

"Hold thy peace and see," the man answered sullenly. "I have my orders."

Courrette questioned no further. He was still indifferent, still hopeless. His life was bound up in the present. He



dare not look ahead ; dare not dwell for a moment upon the future. For what could the future be but a long, dark, hideous dream—a nightmare? Why should he live even to endure it? Life that had ceased to yield any enjoyment was no longer worth retaining. Why then retain it? Would it not be better to assault this fierce, surly Cossack guard, and provoke him into plunging one of those glittering knives into a heart that was already broken, and thus for ever end the misery?

Thus mused Joseph Courrette, as silently and almost mechanically he followed his guard down the dimly-lighted stone corridor, through which the wind moaned dismally and chillingly, until the man rapped on a narrow wooden door ; and on being ordered to enter, he threw the door open, and Courrette found himself in the presence of the captain of the escort, Orzeski.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A NEW HOPE IS BORN.

THE room in which Courrette was ushered was small, but well warmed by a large iron stove. It was filled, too, with the greasy fumes from the pot of tallow with its burning wick, and which was the general mode of lighting in use in the prison of Tomsk, and also in most of the poorer class of houses.

Orzeski was seated in front of the stove. He was smoking a villainously strong and bad cigar, about six inches in length. On a small table beside him stood a great bowl of tea without milk, in which floated several slices of lemon. There was also the indispensable bottle of vodka.

Orzeski rose as the prisoner entered, and, crossing his hands behind him, stood with his back to the stove.

"You can remain outside," he said to the Cossack guard, who made a salute and withdrew.

Courrette was much altered in appearance. He was haggard, pale, and weary-looking. His hair was unkempt, his beard straggling and coarse, and, as the prisoners had had no opportunity of washing themselves since leaving, he was necessarily covered with grime, while his clothes hung in tatters and rags.

As can well be imagined, he was filled with curiosity to know why he had been sent for. For, notwithstanding the apathy and hopelessness which his condition had begotten, he was still capable of curiosity.

"Where do you come from?" asked Orzeski, abruptly.

"What do you mean?" said Joseph, not catching the point of the question.

"Well, you are not a Russian, are you?"

"No."

"Then where is your native place? Perhaps you can understand that question."

"I come from Zurich, in Switzerland."

Orzeski crossed the room to the door and listened for a few moments. Then he returned to the stove and placed his back against it again. He beckoned with his finger to Joseph to come nearer; and when that had been complied with he lowered his voice to a whisper and asked—

"Would you like to go back to Zurich?"

The mere asking of this question would not have caused any surprise in itself, for it might have been asked mockingly—tauntingly. But the manner in which it was asked indicated unmistakably that it carried with it some deep meaning.

Its effect on Courrette was almost magical. It brought, so to speak, the dead man to life again. The heart that was crushed became whole; the soul came back into the body; the withered hopes reblossomed; blank apathy and despair gave place to a nervous thrill, and a yearning desire. The brain that had been frozen and numbed thawed, and was instantly filled with a hundred projects, that like a phantasmagoria were blended and confused, and bewildered the man by their very confusion.

All this may be figurative language, but it precisely and literally describes Courrette's feelings. He was quick of comprehension, and though the stolid heavy face of the man before him betrayed nothing of the thoughts that filled his brain, Joseph came instantly to the conclusion that he had some definite object in asking the question.

"I should," was Courrette's only reply, but his tone betrayed the nervous hope that was thrilling him, and the suspense he felt.

Orzeski lolled against the stove, his small, glittering eyes fixed on the prisoner's face. He blew out a volume of smoke, and then took a big gulp of his tea, and, pouring out a glass of the vodka, he said dryly—

"Here, drink that."

Courrette took the glass like a man who was dreaming, and tossed the liquor down almost without tasting it, fiery as it was. He replaced the glass on the table, and said—

"Thank you."

Then he waited, almost holding his breath, for what should come next. His heart seemed to be beating a rub-a-dub, and his suppressed, nervous excitement caused, or seemed to do so, the blood to surge in his ears, until he heard a sound like the far-off boom of the sea.

"Do you know anything of this country?" asked Orzeski; and on the first blush it might have seemed, especially when the apparently unconcerned manner of the man was considered, that the question was a mere idle one, and asked simply to provoke. But Joseph's intuition was all keenly active now, and he felt, nay knew, that the query was prompted by some deep purpose.

"No," he answered. "It is the first time I have ever been here, and could I get out of the accursed place I would take good care I would never come here again."

"Ah!" exclaimed the other with a little jerky laugh. "that's what all the poor devils who come here think. But some of them do manage to get away, and then they fall into their old habits once more."

"By Heaven," said Joseph, sinking his voice and speaking with great excitement—"By Heaven, give me the chance, and if ever I come here again I will consent to be slowly flayed alive."

"I am going to give you the chance," said Orzeski coolly.

For a moment Joseph reeled with the suddenness of the announcement. Then he spasmodically seized the captain's

hand, but the captain pushed him away and said sternly, though probably the sternness was only assumed—

"Don't lose your head, you fool."

This was at once a caution and a sedative, as it were, to Courrette, and he replied with great decision and point—

"I won't. You may rely upon me."

"I have a reason for giving you a chance of regaining your liberty," pursued Orzeski with great deliberateness, and weighing every word. "What that reason is you need not trouble to inquire. Let it be a mystery to you. I have decided to give you the chance here, because if you go on to our destination, which is yet some seven hundred kilometres, I shall no longer have the power; and even if you managed to get away from Irkutsk, you would scarcely survive the perils you would have to run. To-night, in the dead of night, you will stealthily creep out of your lodging, without disturbing the others. The door will be unbolted, for the Cossack who will be on guard is a creature of mine. But in order to avert suspicion, you will seize him. There will be a struggle, during which he will let you deprive him of his pistol. You are to do him no serious injury, but when you have possessed yourself of the pistol strike him with the butt over the head sufficiently hard to draw blood. I will appear on the scene, but by that time you will have gained the guard-house door, which you will find unfastened. Once outside, turn your face south, and avoiding the towns, gain the Altai Mountains. They are several days' journey. Thence bear south-west, and you'll be able to reach Turkestan and find shelter in Samarkand or Bokhara. It is a long and hazardous journey, but a determined man, with good powers of endurance, may accomplish it. Here are a few roubles. Don't compromise me, but be cautious, resolute, and prudent."

Courrette took the money, but once more he felt like a man in a dream. He was bewildered at this unexpected prospect of liberty. Then suddenly he remembered

Strovelle, and he said, speaking hurriedly, but in a low tone—

"As you request I will not seek to know the cause that prompts you to this generous deed. But my companion, my friend Strovelle, must go too, or, failing that, I shall decline to avail myself of the chance you put in my way."

Orzeski showed surprise for the first time, and exclaimed—

"That is more than I bargained for. I admire you for it though. A man who can think of his friend in such circumstances is genuine. But——" he hesitated, then—"But I cannot let Strovelle go."

"Then I remain," answered Joseph, firmly.

Orzeski seemed a little disconcerted, and his self-command was disturbed. He bit his moustache and knit his brow. He was evidently debating with himself what he should do, but he soon came to a decision.

"Very well," he said, "perhaps it is better that two of you should go. It may avert suspicion. Take Strovelle with you."

Joseph's heart was thumping now with the powerful excitement and emotion that made his face burn ; and with an irresistible impulse he once more seized Orzeski's hand, and warmly shook it.

"You must go back now," said the Captain. "To-night I will place behind the door of the guard-house a bundle containing a supply of dried food and some cartridges for the pistol. Don't forget it, for it may be many days before you reach a place where you can obtain supplies."

He crossed over to the door and opened it. The Cossack was standing like a statue in the passage.

"Take this man back," said the Captain, sternly.

The soldier made a salute, and led Courrette to the prison room again.

Most of the prisoners had rolled themselves in the greasy sheepskins and gone to sleep, for they were wearied out with hardships. Courrette crept into his place beside Strovelle,

who was asleep ; but in a little while Courrette woke him up and whispered into his ear—

"To-night, you and I will make a dash for liberty. Ask no questions now. When the time comes you will follow me in silence. You must remain perfectly passive, and though I may engage in a struggle you take no part. Do you understand ? Our lives depend on your doing this."

"Good ; I understand," returned Strovelle, without betraying the slightest excitement.

Then they both pulled the skins up about their ears to keep out the cold, and tried to sleep, but they dozed only in snatches, for the prospect of freedom prevented them from sleeping long.

Slowly the dreary hours passed. To those two watchful and waiting men they seemed interminable. The other prisoners slept. What inducement was there for them to keep awake ? Sleep was a blessed Lethe in which they steeped themselves, regretting only that it could not be eternal. Courrette had no means of knowing the hour, but he guessed at length that the time had come. He partly rose up and listened. All was still, and the room was in darkness, for the grease torch had gone out.

"Are you ready ?" he whispered to his companion.

"Yes," was the answer.

They had no preparations to make, but at Strovelle's suggestion they each took a sheepskin, knowing how useful it would be to them at night. Then they crept silently to the door. It was unfastened. They opened it, passed out, and closed the door again. The corridor was silent as death. As they reached the end a Cossack, who had been dozing or pretending to doze on a wooden bench let into a niche in the wall and near a stove, sprang up and confronted them. Following out the instructions given him by Orzeski, Courrette closed with the man, and there was a struggle, during which Joseph seized the pistol, and dealt the Cossack a blow on the head, so that he reeled, staggered, and fell.

The bundle was in its place behind the door. Joseph possessed himself of it ; then he and his companion stepped into the open air, and for the time were free. The sensation they both experienced it would be impossible to describe. Suppressed excitement almost made them feel as if they were drunk. But they knew that this was only the beginning of the end, and the end was a long way off. Before them lay tremendous hardship, peril, and privation, and it might be that they were simply going to a painful and terrible death.

The night was solemn and silent. There was no wind, but the cold was deadly. The stars shone with dazzling splendour, and to the north an aurora borealis glittered with resplendent grandeur. No living thing gave sign of life. Everything was hushed in frozen silence.

Strovelle was greatly moved. All the hardship and misery he had endured had not affected him as he now was affected. He turned and grasped his companion's hand. Tears coursed down his cheeks, and he spoke with a voice thick and broken with deep emotion.

"You shall explain this mystery later on," he said. "We are free, and sooner than be recaptured we'll die. But what is our course, and where do we go to?"

"Southward," answered Courrette, no less moved. Then setting their faces by the watchful stars, they wrapped their sheepskins about them and hurried away from the town and out into the wilderness of snow, where death in a dozen forms confronted them.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

THE announcement made by Rebecca Cohen to Kalnoky, that she was already married, came upon him like a thunder-clap, so that he could only stare at her in a kind of stupid amazement ; while she on her part also stood motionless and silent, and with her head slightly bowed, as though she was ashamed and even startled at having been led into the confession. Then Kalnoky's surprise passed away, and he said angrily—

“ I don't believe you.”

She looked up quickly now, and a flash of indignant anger leapt from her eyes as she said, with withering irony—

“ Thank you for nothing.”

He bit his lip, turned round on his heel with a gesture of irritation, and suddenly facing her once more, repeated—

“ I don't believe you. It's an invention—*a lie*.”

“ I tell you it's the truth,” she exclaimed so passionately that he was startled.

He bit his nails, and beat a tattoo with his foot. Seldom, if ever, did he show irritation of this kind ; but he seemed to have lost all control over himself, and the quiet, reserved, self-possessed man had changed into a being who was all nervousness, irritability, and excitement.

“ When were you married ? ” he asked sharply.

Angered by his domineering manner, and stung by his deliberate accusation of falsehood, she answered no less sharply—

"That is my affair."

"And mine too," he said.

"Indeed !"

"Yes, indeed ; for either you have made me your silly dupe, or you are befooling me now."

"I have done neither the one nor the other."

"I say you have, and again I ask you when you were married, and to whom ?"

"And again I refuse to answer you—at any rate as long as you speak to me and treat me as if I were your menial."

Her words seemed to excite him more. His character apparently had undergone a complete change in the few minutes that had passed since she flashed the startling intelligence upon him. He displayed to her for the first time qualities that she had never dreamed he possessed. He had torn off his mask, lifted the veil, and revealed a dangerous, excitable, and impetuous man.

"If you are not my menial you are at least in my power," he exclaimed, as he shook both his hands in her face.


She got a little alarmed, and drew back from him.

"Really, Kalnoky," she said, "you seem beside yourself, and one would fancy you had been drinking. A few minutes ago you talked kindly to me, and spoke of trying to win my love. Now, if I had done you a mortal injury, and were I your greatest enemy you couldn't treat me more harshly than you are doing."

"You *have* done me a mortal injury, because you have shamefully deceived me," he hissed with fiery vehemence.

Naturally his words and manner only added fuel to the fire. She could not stand being bullied and brow-beaten by a man whom she had hitherto looked upon as her father's dependant. And her pride being wounded and her vanity touched she forgot for the time being how she had placed herself in his toils.

"In what way have I deceived you ?" she demanded, with a passionate gesture.



"In what way! Need you ask?" he retorted.

"Yes, because I am altogether unconscious of having deceived you in any way."

"Are you really?" he said with a bitter sneer. "If you are so forgetful then I will freshen your memory. You have lured me on by artful wiles——"

"It's false," she interrupted, angrily.

"It's true," he continued. "I repeat, you have lured me on; lured me into a belief that I might some day win you."

"I have told you over and over again that there was a barrier which rendered it impossible that I could become your wife."

"You told me so at first, but you qualified it afterwards, and you cannot, dare not, deny that you gave me cause to hope." She averted her face a little, for she felt that his accusation was deserved. He noticed this movement, and interpreting it aright he stung her still more severely.

"I see now," he went on, "what a double game you played so long as you could use me——"

"In what way have I used you?" she demanded almost fiercely, for she writhed under the lash of his tongue.

"Your own conscience will tell you that," he returned. "You have caused me to place myself in peril; to tamper with a Government officer—my half brother; and all for what? In order that you might set free a man with whom you are enamoured."

"It's a dastardly lie," she cried as her pale face grew scarlet. "I am not enamoured with him."

"You may deny it as much and as indignantly as you like," he answered, "but the facts will tell against you. What were the motives which prompted you in this matter? Why were you so anxious that Joseph Courrette should be saved? Why did you allow me to conceive the impression that I stood well with you and might win you? I answer and tell you, that it was because you were willing to go to any length, willing to do anything, to practise any amount of deception,

and make a fool of me to any extent, so long as you could release your lover."

She fairly trembled now. Emotion shook her from head to foot. His words were barbed shafts that entered into her flesh, so to speak, and tortured her. Until now she had not fully realized the dangerous position she had placed herself in, nor how she had inadvertently and thoughtlessly deceived the man before her. It was true she had deceived him, and she had to admit it to herself. But at the time she did not see it in the light in which she now viewed it. She had acted impulsively, and without looking ahead or weighing all the probabilities that were inseparable from her action. She was deserving of blame—that she knew—but not of so much blame as he was pouring upon her—so she thought. She gave way to her feelings, for after all she was a woman, and she broke into sobbing. He was not touched by this, but said sneeringly—

"I am glad your conscience pricks you, but you need not think to soften me with your crocodile tears."

This aroused her more than anything else he had yet said, and it made her reckless.


"You coward, you brute!" she exclaimed, "you would not dare to treat me like this if I had any one to protect me. But you take advantage of my defenceless and lonely position."

"Yes, your lover is in Siberia," he retorted with a bitter laugh. "No doubt you would appeal to him if he were here."

"He is not my lover," she answered; "but whatever he is, you were coward and traitor enough to betray him, and as I felt he was too good a man to be lost to the world, I have compromised myself to save him."

"Because he is your lover," insisted Kalnoky between his set teeth.

"You state a shameful falsehood," she exclaimed. "I deny indignantly that he is my lover. I told him, as I told



you, that it was impossible he could be anything to me more than what he is. I am married——”

“Did you tell him so?” demanded Kalnoky, in his excitement and passion seizing her wrist roughly, and peering into her face.

She wrenched herself free and hissed the word—

“No.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Because I had no occasion to do so.”

“Why then did you think it was necessary to tell me? He made love to you. You allowed him to make love to you; and yet, if what you say is true, you did this as a married woman.”

“I tell you again, and again, and again,” she cried, stamping her foot with passion, “that there is no truth in what you say beyond that Courrette did want to make love to me. But I stopped him at once. I did not tell him I was married; but I did tell him that it was utterly impossible that I could ever be his wife, and therefore he was not to speak of love to me again.”

Kalnoky smiled as if he felt that he had gained a triumph, and catching her up on her words he said—

“He did want to make love to you, did he? And yet, after you have confessed so much to me, do you suppose that I am such a poor blind fool as not to see that your anxiety for him to get free arose from the fact that he had made love to you. It may be true, as you say, that you are married, but even married women sometimes have lovers.”

She tried to speak, but her feelings of indignation checked her words, and she could only gasp out—

“I’ll stay here no longer to be insulted in such a base and cowardly manner.”

She turned to go, but he seized her by the arm, and held her in his grip.

“Stay, Rebecca,” he said with a menacing sort of growl,

"I hav'n't quite done with you yet. You tell me you are married, and I suppose you want me to believe that."

"You can believe whatever you like," she said as she shook him off angrily.

"Tell me one thing—where is your husband, and why has so much secrecy been made about your marriage?" he asked.

"I'll tell you nothing beyond what I have already told you. There is no reason that I am aware of why you should be informed of all my family affairs."


This anger and bitterness was not calculated to appease him; and had she had more command over herself she might have tried to soothe rather than irritate him, for she ought to have seen that it was infinitely better to have him as a friend than as an enemy.

"Very well," he answered determinedly, "so be it. But do not think the matter shall rest where it is. You have placed me in too awkward a position for that, and before I could take steps to keep your lover in Siberia, even were it advisable for me to do so, he will probably have escaped. What arrangement there may be between you and him is your own secret; but at any rate you shall find to your cost that you cannot trifle with me with impunity, and that I am not to be made a fool of lightly. You are in my power, and you know it. I have a confession in my hands——"

"But you would not dare to use it," she gasped, growing pale with fright.

"Would not dare! and why not pray? What have you done that I should spare you? Would not dare!" he repeated, with a scornful toss of the head. "You shall live to prove what I dare and will do. I could have forgiven you much had you not cheated and bamboozled me in such an artful manner. I could and would have loved you, but now I—well, I will not say what my feelings are."

She seemed perfectly dumbfounded by his revengeful bitterness, and she saw now that when it was too late that she



had committed a fatal blunder in giving him that terrible document, which unmistakably placed her and her father under this man's heel. Ruin, grim and horrible, appeared to stare her in the face ; for if Kalnoky denounced her she knew only too well what the consequences would be. Between Nihilism and the Government it was war to the death, and it was only necessary to point the finger at a person and raise the cry of "Nihilist !" for the Nemesis of the law to swoop down, and woebetide the unhappy man or woman who came within its grip. When once the fangs of the law had fastened on a "suspect" it was almost impossible to shake them off, and the captive was surely doomed. His property was confiscated, and he was either sent to the scaffold or Siberia.

Of all this Rebecca was perfectly aware, and she knew what she had to expect if the man before her proved pitiless.

For some moments she looked at him with an appealing, sorrowing look ; then in a broken voice she said—"You are a man, and should have pity for my weakness. I have done wrong I know in raising your hopes in any way. But place yourself in my position for a moment and you will feel for me. I am still young, but my life has been blighted, and I have been the victim of treachery and knavery that should beget me your pity and commiseration."

"You might have had them," he remarked impatiently, "had you not shown partiality for Courrette, and befooled me into giving him his liberty."

"Well, even if I admit having done this," she said, lowering her face as if from a sense of shame, "I may still claim your pity."

"I fail to see it in that light," he answered in wrathful tones. "You have victimized me, and what compensation am I to have for that?"

A sudden brightness flashed into her face as he said this, for his words raised up hope in her heart.

"It's money he wants," she thought, and she said quickly—

"Name a moderate sum, and I will endeavour to obtain it from my father, and give it to you."

In an instant her hopes fell again, and the brightness faded out of her face to give way to gloomy despair, for, with a coarse laugh, he cried—

"I don't want your money ; I have told you that before. All the money you and your father have got would not buy me."

"What do you want, then ?" she asked, looking at him with a look of pitiable distress.

"I want you."

"Have I not told you that it is impossible your want can be gratified ?"

"It is not impossible," he returned, "for though you cannot be my wife you can be my mistress."

She started from him, and her burning eyes told her anger and scorn.

"You coward," she hissed. "You mean, contemptible coward, to make such a proposition. If you think I have sunk so low as to defile myself in such a manner you are utterly mistaken, and if you cannot serve me, cannot pity me on any other terms, I defy you. You can do your worst. Drag my grey-headed father into the pitiless toils of the law, and crush me if you will it so. But, I will, at least, preserve my honour, and a curse will assuredly fall upon you." She could say no more. She was choked with mingled passion and grief, and, turning hurriedly round, she walked away, and left him standing there.

He seemed disconcerted at this unexpected and stormy ending to the interview. But presently a scornful smile spread itself about his mouth, and he muttered, spitefully—

"I think, young woman, the game is in my hands, and, before I've done with you, I'll break your pride, and humble you into the dust."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ON THE NARROW STRAND.

WHEN Joseph Courrette and Strovella got clear of the guard-house at Tomsk, they both knew perfectly well that they had peril to face of no ordinary kind. There was first the peril of being recaptured, for in all the towns and villages of Siberia notices were posted warning the inhabitants of the penalties for sheltering fugitives ; and at the same time setting forth that considerable rewards were paid to any one who should effect the capture of an escaped convict. These towns, however, being, as it were, oases, are very isolated, and fugitives may avoid them. But then there were the natural dangers to be encountered, for, though the climate improved as one travelled south, there were, nevertheless, deadly swamps, and vast and trackless forests, swarming with reptiles and wild beasts, to be traversed ; and there were rivers to be crossed ; and many weary miles of desolate wilderness in which the difficulties of fugitives finding food were so great that to journey through them seemed hopeless. But the dangers before them were preferable to the horrors they were leaving behind. Moreover, it was better to suffer, and, if need be, die in freedom, than suffer and die in chains.

Although Strovella had never been in Siberia before, he had studied the geography of it, for, as he remarked with grim humour to his companion—"I have for a long time looked forward to visiting the country some day, and so I

thought I might as well know something about it." As he pointed out to Courrette they must endeavour to reach the Altai Mountains, which form the physical frontier between Siberia and Mongolia. These mountains once reached, the fugitives would be comparatively safe, and they might either pass into the great Chinese Empire, or by bearing southwest, gain Turkestan, and thence Persia, and from there reach some port in the Persian Gulf.

Such, then, were the prospects before them, and they were prospects that would sorely have tried men well equipped and provided for such an arduous undertaking. But for two men who were almost without food, and who were escaped convicts, upon whose heads a price was set, to undertake such a journey was to enter upon a forlorn hope, in which the chances of coming safely out of it were exceedingly small as compared with the chances of perishing. But Courrette and his companion were not appalled, and they made their way rapidly through the deserted streets of Tomsk. Two or three times a dog gave tongue, but with this exception the death-like silence was unbroken. The cold was awful, and in order to keep themselves warm they walked as rapidly as possible, swinging their arms about, and burying the lower part of their faces in the sheepskins. In the course of an hour they had cleared the houses, and before them stretched the plain of ghastly white snow, unbroken until in the far, dim distances, was a line of dark pines. The fugitives pushed on at a rapid rate, being anxious to have the town as far behind as possible when the day broke. With keen, frosty brilliancy, the stars burned, and lighted them on their way. For several weary hours the two men walked until day began to break on their left, and soon the welcome sun rose, throwing a ruddy glow over the snow, and warming with his fiery beams the half-frozen fugitives.² In a little while they stopped, and spreading

² Although in these northern latitudes the rays of the sun are very powerful, they exert no influence on the snow, owing to the excessive

their sheepskins out, they partook of a mouthful of food, and reposed their weary limbs. Courrette found in the bundle which Orzeski had provided him with a supply of matches and tobacco, and a small axe, besides the ammunition for the pistol, and the dried food already alluded to. The axe was almost indispensable on such a journey, as it enabled the possessor to make holes in the ice to obtain water, and to chop down branches of trees for firing.

So far Orzeski had faithfully carried out his agreement with his half-brother, which was to give Courrette his liberty. Possibly Kalnoky himself hoped that Courrette would not live, but on that score he did not trouble himself much, and as Orzeski had no special interest one way or the other, but thinking that his brother, who had not given him any particulars, was desirous that his *protégé* should reach civilization again, he had done what he could to further that end. Now, for the first time, Courrette told Strovelle of the interview he had had with Orzeski, and what had passed. But Strovelle expressed no surprise. He simply said that no doubt some of their Nihilist friends had been at work. And, then, after some reflection, he added—

“I don't exactly know why you wanted to save me. I am not sure that I shouldn't have preferred the hardships and horrors of convict life in Siberia. The end for me would soon have come. Now I feel like the wandering Jew. I am going on over the world. But where I know not, and why I know not. I have no aim, no purpose, only to accompany you.”

lowness of the temperature, which is not sensibly raised by the sun during the few hours it shines. As indicating the severity of the Siberian climate in the central and northern parts of the country, it may be mentioned that in winter the temperature is often 90 degrees Fahrenheit below freezing point, that is, about 60 degrees below zero. This degree of cold can only be measured by spirits of wine, as mercury freezes at 58 degrees Fahrenheit, and in this inhospitable region it is frozen for three and four months in the year. As is generally the case in these latitudes, the heat of the short summer is almost unbearable.—*The Author.*

"You are a strange being, and seem to have led a strange life. I should like to know your story."

Strovelle turned his haggard eyes on his companion's face, and, after a pause, said, strangely—


"Would you? It's not a pleasant one. There are pages I would like to blot out; but some day, perhaps, I'll tell you part of it, though it will only be when I think my end is near."

A week passed, and day by day they pursued their terrible journey through the wilderness. At times they were in imminent peril from wild animals, though they managed to keep them at bay. But now they were threatened with even greater peril, that of starvation, for their scant stock of dried food was exhausted. Fortunately, as they proceeded south, the climate became less rigorous, and just when they were driven to desperation for the want of provisions, and had determined, at all risks, to enter a village, they managed by stratagem to shoot with the pistol a young animal, a species of deer, which did not roam further north in the winter than this limit.

The famished men at once made a fire of pine sticks, and enjoyed a substantial meal. Then they cut off as much of the meat as they could carry between them, and this they rolled in strips and made up into a bundle. The weather was still cold enough to keep meat fresh for weeks.

This new supply helped them on their journey for many scores of miles, but, of course, it came to an end at last, and once more they found themselves confronted with the problem—How were they to get food? If they had been provided with a good gun they could have managed. But the pistol was of little or no use, unless, as in the case of the deer, they could get within range.

They had reached a different region now. Vast forests stretched away on all sides, and, consequently, their rate of progress became slower. Great and treacherous swamps compelled them sometimes to make wide detours, and rivers at other times drove them almost to despair.



At length, one day, towards its close, they came in sight of a village standing in a clearing of the forest, and, being pressed with hunger, and wearying for even a bed of straw, they determined to enter the village. This they did, and they soon became aware that the inhabitants eyed them not only with curiosity, but with suspicion. But their needs and sufferings emboldened them, and affecting indifference to the suspicious looks, they made their way to the trackteer, and ordered food. The landlord, a surly Tartar, being no less suspicious than his neighbours, demanded payment in advance, and, when this was forthcoming, he seemed surprised, but nevertheless, took the money, and furnished the travellers with what they wanted. Then, as they consumed their much-needed meal, he plied them with questions—artfully framed, however, so, as he thought, not to alarm them. But Strovella was too old a bird to be taken in with such poor chaff, and he cleverly fenced the questions, and briefly said that he and his companion were explorers who had been robbed of their effects. The incredulous smile on the landlord's face told that the story wasn't believed, although he did not say so. The travellers announced their intention of passing the night there, and ordered a supply of food to be put up to carry with them on the morrow. And as they tendered the money in advance the food was provided, but the landlord's manner put Strovella on the alert. He mentioned his fears to Courrette, and suggested that they should take their departure in the dead of night. Then Strovella started off into the village to buy a hide knapsack, peculiar to the country, and which would be invaluable to them for carrying their stores in. Courrette remained behind to "keep his eye on the landlord," as Strovella put it.

In the course of half-an hour Strovella returned with the knapsack and various odds and ends likely to be of service on their journey, and soon after they retired to their beds, but hardly to sleep. For Strovella was doubtful about the

landlord, and expressed a belief that he meant to betray them, and this belief was strengthened when a little later they heard him leave the house.

"We must clear out of this as soon as possible," said Strovelle, and they resolved to go in the course of a couple of hours or so, when there would be little fear of meeting any of the villagers abroad. But very soon they heard the landlord return in company with other men, and there was much discussion carried on in low tones.

"We are trapped," said Strovelle, and he proceeded to make an examination of the room, and with his companion's aid he barricaded the door by placing a heavy box filled with firewood against it. Then silently and cautiously he opened the small window; not an easy task, for every cranny was stopped up with paper to keep the cold out, and it seemed as if it had not been opened for years. But after much perseverance he succeeded, and then a wooden shutter, fastened with an iron bolt, gave an infinity of trouble, for the bolt was rusty, though at last this was overcome, and the freezing night air blew in on the fugitives. It was an intensely dark night. Not a star was visible, for snow was threatening to fall. The house was built on piles, as most of the houses are in these southern Siberian villages. This is done owing to the enormous quantities of snow that fall, and which would otherwise bury the dwellings.

"I don't know what is beneath, but we must risk it," said Strovelle. And so, having fairly divided their belongings between them, Strovelle carrying the knapsack, they dropped quietly out of the window. As fortune would have it there was an accumulation of soft snow beneath, and so they escaped unhurt. But their escape had evidently been discovered, for they heard the door tried and shaken angrily, and at last burst open. Then there was a tramping of feet and a Babel of angry voices, and men's heads were thrust from the window.

The fugitives were evidently in a little patch of garden

that was closed in with a fence. They climbed this fence, but before they could descend on the other side several shots were fired at random from the window, and Strovelle rolled over with a groan.

"Good heavens! are you shot?" exclaimed his companion, in wild alarm.

"I am hit, but I don't think it's serious," answered Strovelle, as he struggled to his feet. "Come, let us go."

This was reassuring, and they started off, and in a quarter of an hour they had got clear of the houses, and were in the open country again. Still keeping to the south, they pressed on at a rapid rate, but in a couple of hours snow was falling heavily, which, while it added greatly to their discomfort and misery, was in other respects in their favour, as it would prevent pursuit. They got into the shelter of a clump of trees that grew in a hollow, and thereby afforded them protection from the storm. Then for the first time Strovelle complained of pain, saying he had been struck by a bullet in the shoulder. When daylight broke an examination revealed the fact that the bullet had entered on the top of the left shoulder at its junction with the neck. Thence it had travelled downward, and emerged some three inches below its place of entry. It had not touched any vital part, and so in that respect there was no danger. But there had been considerable loss of blood, and stiffness had set in, accompanied with great pain. But the sufferer bore it unflinchingly, and tried to make light of it. Courrette bound the wound up as best he could with the appliances at hand, and they remained in their shelter for three or four hours, until the storm abated, when they renewed their journey.

A week passed without any special incident, and they gained the Altai Mountains. During the whole of this time Strovelle had suffered severely. But he bore his sufferings without a murmur, and without complaint. Courrette had done all that he could to give him ease and

comfort, but from the want of proper medical treatment the wound had inflamed alarmingly, and the sufferer had given indications that his general health was breaking down, and that he was getting weaker. They had reached a region where cultivated land alternated with forest. There was no snow at the base of the mountains, only on the summits ; and, while the nights were not excessively cold, as compared with what the fugitives had experienced, the days were pleasantly warm. Keeping in the valley, they travelled more to the west now, in order to try and reach Bokhara, in Turkestan, but it became painfully evident to Courrette that his companion was failing. His eyes had sunk into his head, his face was ghastly pale, and he tottered from weakness as he walked.

"Strovelle," he said in alarm one evening, "I must try and get you some assistance, for you are very ill."

"No, my good friend," the other answered sadly. "There is no assistance to be got. We shall have to be careful in this region, for the frontier is well guarded, and we shall be recaptured if we are not exceedingly cautious. But what you must do is leave me behind, and seek your own safety, for I am going out into the darkness."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Courrette anxiously.

"I am dying," said Strovelle bluntly, and with a grim smile on his pallid face.

"I don't believe it," Courrette answered with anxiety expressed in his tone. "But anyway I shall not leave you. We came together, and death only shall separate us."

A strange tremor of emotion thrilled Strovelle at these words, and choked some utterance he would have made. But with a spasmodic, impulsive movement he seized his friend's hand, and wrung it warmly. In some little time, when he had mastered his feelings, he said with a sound that was wonderfully like a sob—

"Courrette, I must rest somewhere, for I feel very ill."

Courrette espied some masses of rocks piled up beneath

an overhanging cliff from which they had fallen. These huge blocks had so come together that they bore some resemblance to a hut, with a cavernous recess that afforded excellent shelter. To this place they made their way, and Courrette collected a heap of branches and leaves, and spreading the sheepskins over them made a tolerable bed, and, as Strovelle sank painfully down upon it with difficulty, repressing a groan of anguish, he said—

"I have come here to die. Here, far removed from the busy haunts of men, and such comfort and succour as civilization could afford, I must end my miserable days."

"Do not talk like that," answered Courrette encouragingly. "You are ill, no doubt, but I'll pull you through. You want plenty of food and rest, and you will get all right. The rest you can have here, and food I'll obtain by fair means or foul."

Strovelle shook his head sadly, as he said with a wan smile—

"It's no use, camarade. I'm stricken with death. I feel it."

Then his whole manner suddenly changed. A violent shudder took him, a look of terror came into his face, and with a convulsive gasp he added—

"But even this is better than I deserve, for there is blood upon my soul—the blood of those who did me no wrong. And since there is no priest here to shrive me, I must make my confession to you."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CONFESSION.

THE strange words uttered by the sick man startled Courrette, and he peered into the white face as if trying to read the surging thoughts that were torturing that dying brain. But the lids over Strovelle's sunken eyes were closed, and save for the quivering lips and the twitching of the neuralgic nerves of the cheeks, the face might have been the face of the dead.

The region in which they now were was one of wild and savage grandeur. The mountains were rent and scarred with dark ravines, down which the torrents poured, filling the air with their thunder. Mighty precipices, about which the eagles soared and wheeled, rose up above the forests that were strewn with a chaos of stupendous blocks that had crashed down from the heights above. From any eminence whence the eye could roam unchecked it ranged over a panorama of vast extent, and magnificent forest land stretched away for scores and scores of miles, and far off in the dim distance were the glittering snows of the plains. It was a primitive solitude; the home of the bear and the wolf, whose growl and bark mingled with the roar of the falling torrents and the crash of the shattered rocks. Trees that had stood the tempests of centuries reared their proud heads as if vieing with the snow-capped mountains. Giant oaks contested for supremacy with mighty cedars that interlaced their great, dark branches in a tangled network, beneath which grew in

rank luxuriance rare mosses and flaunting weeds. It was, in fact, the very paradise of vegetation, amidst which revelled thousands of creeping things ; while birds of prey fearlessly made their eeries in the recesses of the riven crags. Here and there in the forests were small and isolated villages, but so hemmed in were they that until the traveller came upon them he was unaware of their position or existence. The inhabitants of these villages were for the most part Cossacks or Tartars. The men were warlike and savage, and were frequently making incursions into neighbouring territory. Sometimes they descended into Turkestan, or, crossing the mountains, raided on Mongolian soil.

As Courrette looked at his dying companion, and then realized the situation in which they were placed, he could hardly avoid a sickening sense of despair, for he could afford little or no assistance to his friend, while he himself felt that notwithstanding all the suffering and privation he had gone through, it was extremely doubtful whether he would get clear of Russian territory, near as he was to the frontier. Already they were tortured with the pangs of hunger, and it would be impossible to proceed farther without some assistance, and each knew that here in this frontier region a sharp vigilance was exercised for fugitives from the north.

Strovelle must have defined some of the thoughts which agitated his companion, for he said—

"You must leave me after I have told you what I want to tell you, for my end has come. But you can save yourself. A few days more and you will be out of this country, and then many of the difficulties which have beset our journey will have ended, for you will be able to openly and fearlessly solicit assistance."

Strovelle's way of speaking and his ghastly looks and rapidly-increasing weakness left Courrette no room to doubt that his friend was really dying. But still he was resolved to make an effort to procure food at least, and so he answered—

"You may be dying, as you say, but my impression is

you are dying more from the want of proper nourishment, and I will see what I can do to get you some, and so save you."

Strovelle smiled sadly as he shook his head and said—

"No, my friend, nourishment will not save me. It's my wound that's killing. Had it been attended to at first it would have been more annoying than dangerous, but now it is too late. The wound is mortifying, and I am dying of blood poisoning."

Courrette turned away to hide his emotion, and as Strovelle seemed inclined to sleep, he went out into the forest and darkness, for night had fallen, but it was a clear night, and a young moon shed a silvery light over the scene. Courrette returned after an absence of about ten minutes, and put some more sticks upon the fire. He expected to find Strovelle asleep, but this was not the case, and so he sat down beside him and held his hand, much to the dying man's comfort, for in such a place and at such a time it was more than comforting to have human companionship.

As the hours sped away Strovelle got very restless. He was evidently suffering great pain, and once or twice he became delirious and rambled, and on one of these occasions he made use of these words—

"Conscience is a scorpion that sting us into madness."

Courrette slept for some time, and when he awoke the fire that had burned at the entrance to their cavernous retreat had smouldered into ashes, and he got up to replenish it, for not only was it useful on account of the warmth, but as a protection from the ravenous nocturnal animals. As he was about to throw himself on his sheepskin again he glanced at his companion and noticed that he had changed very much. His cheeks had fallen in, and his hollow eyes seemed glassy as the firelight gleamed upon them.

"How do you feel now?" he asked, kindly and sympathetically.

Strovelle did not speak for some minutes, and then he did

not answer the question, but asked another in a strange, sepulchral voice.

"Camarade, do you think there is a God?"

The question was solemn and startling, and the roar of the cataracts, the growling of the forest beasts, the scream of the night birds, the chirp of the insects, the voice of the wind amongst the trees, all seemed to answer an unmistakable and emphatic—

"Yes."

Courrette also answered—

"Yes, I think so."

Strovelle remained silent for some time before he spoke again. Then, showing that his mind was rational and coherent, he continued the subject, saying—

"I used to think there was not. Now I think there is. As a young man I was brought up as a good Catholic, for my parents were religious people. But when I went to Switzerland the results of my training were all undone. Ah! would that I could blot Switzerland out of my memory," he exclaimed, with a spasmodic shudder.

It was evident that talking was a great exertion, and served to exhaust his little remaining stock of strength, so Courrette persuaded him to remain quiet; and he himself, feeling overcome by the want of sleep, yielded to the drowsiness that stole over him, and was soon oblivious of his surroundings.

When he awoke the sun was shining brilliantly, and the thousand voices of the day were chanting a psalm of praise at Nature's altar. Strovelle was also awake, and though the ghastly appearance of his face had somewhat lessened and the pain had left him, his physical weakness was extreme.

"I intend to have some food by hook or by crook," said Courrette resolutely, as he stretched himself and examined the priming of his pistol.

"Don't leave me," pleaded Strovelle pathetically.

"I will endeavour not to be away long," answered Courrette, "but we must have food. Perhaps I can shoot something or discover a village."

"Very well then, go ; but come back to me," said Strovelle with a sigh.

Courrette turned and looked at the sick man reproachfully, then remarked—

"Do you suppose I am base enough to desert you while you live ? "

"No, no, I didn't mean that," exclaimed the invalid, with a sudden energy. "I know you are too staunch and true to desert a dying camarade. My regret is that I shall be deprived of your company even for a short time."

Courrette was greatly touched, and, shaking his friend's hand with a warm, honest, nervous grasp, he said—

"I will come back soon, but food we must have."

Then he went out, and taking good note of the spot where the dying man was sheltered, he passed down the sloping ground into the thick forest, trusting entirely to chance and luck. He had walked on for about half-an-hour, keeping his eyes keenly on the alert, but seeing nothing save birds, which were exceedingly numerous and wonderfully varied. But presently his attention was arrested by what seemed to be a film of smoke, which he discerned some distance ahead through an opening in the forest. He stopped and gazed intently, and assured himself it was smoke, and he muttered—

"Where there is smoke there is fire, and where there is fire there are human beings not far off, for four-legged animals don't make fires. I must be cautious."

He proceeded on taking care to conceal himself as much as possible, and soon he was able to see that the smoke arose from the fire of some charcoal burners, but the only living soul in sight was an old woman, seated on a piece of rock, spinning a web of flax. He approached her boldly, much to her amazement and alarm, and, addressing her in Russ,

which she understood, he asked her if there was a village near.

She put down her flax, and rising from her seat eyed him curiously.

"There is no village within a league and a half," she answered. "But whence comest thou, and whither goest thou ? for thou art a stranger."

"I am a trader travelling with a companion to Persia. But we have been robbed and maltreated, and have lost all we possessed, and now my companion lies in a cave in a dying state. If your heart is not stone you will render me succour."

"My heart is not stone, stranger," she answered kindly, "but, alas ! I am poor. I am but a charcoal burner, who, with my husband and crippled son, eke out our living by selling our charcoal in the village. But if thou desirest food, that will I give thee. I have nothing more."

"It is all I ask, and for what you give I will pay," answered Courrette, and then in obedience to her request he followed the woman for some yards to a little wooden hut, half buried amongst the trees.

"My husband is away, but my son lies here ill," said the woman, pausing at the door.

She entered the hut, and Courrette stood on the threshold, but he was able to see in, and on the floor observed a shrivelled-up, wretched-looking boy of about twenty lying on some skins.

The woman had some conversation with her son in a language Courrette did not understand. They seemed to be discussing something, and the boy evidently got excited, and appeared to be addressing his mother in forcible and passionate language. Presently the woman turned round and called Courrette in. The youth eyed him, and glared at him like a wild beast in its lair ; while his mother, speaking to Courrette, said—

"My son says thou must be a convict, and if so, we risk our lives if we succour thee."

"Woman !" exclaimed Courrette as he drew his pistol and levelled it full in the face of the youth on the skins, "I am starving, and my companion is dying. We want food, and must have it ; and if you decline to give it to me, I will blow the brains out of thy cub."

The youth was terrified and scared, but the woman said with perfect self-possession—

"Put up thy weapon, man. I told thee my heart was not stone. We are poor, but not savages. Thou shalt have such food as our poor store affords."

Courrette put his weapon away, and the woman took out a small canvas bag from a box ; and in it she placed some rice, a loaf of black bread, a piece of goat's milk cheese, some dried smoked goat's flesh, and a piece of bear's flesh, and then handing the bag to Courrette, she said—

"That is all we can spare thee."

He grasped the bag eagerly, and in return gave the woman two roubles, at which she was agreeably astonished, while the eyes of the cripple on the skin fired up with greedy avarice.

Anxious to get back Courrette bade the woman and her son adieu and hurried away.

He did not find his way back to the cave easily, and two or three times retraced his steps in despair. The forest was so bewildering, and the boulders were strewn about in such chaotic confusion. But at last his efforts were rewarded, and his return gladdened the heart of his dying friend to whom he related his adventure. But Strovellé did not seem to take much interest. All energy had left him and he had become very weak. He was a pitiable wreck, and his face wore an expression of great mental anxiety. Courrette roasted a piece of the bear's meat over the fire, and the invalid ate a small morsel of it with evident relish. He had lost the use of his left arm owing to the great inflammation arising from the wound.

This inflammation had spread below the elbow and caused great suffering to the unhappy man. Courrette washed the

wound well and bound it up with wet rags. And after this the invalid fell asleep, and as Courrette had nothing else to do but think of his misery he followed the example and was soon sleeping soundly.

The day was far advanced when he awoke, and the weather had changed. The sky was hidden by dense masses of clouds, from which lightning occasionally leaped. And soon heavy drops of rain began to patter down, and peals of thunder reverberated amongst the mountains like batteries of artillery. Suddenly the rain increased to a deluge, and the roar and tumult in the forest were deafening.

As is often the case with people in a dying state, Strovella was greatly affected by the storm. It produced in him a painful, nervous excitation, no doubt the result of the highly electrical condition of the atmosphere. He became so restless that, weak as he was, he could scarcely keep still. The storm raged for hours, but for some time after the thunder had ceased to roll and the lightning to flash the rain descended steadily, and the whole forest was steeped in a melancholy gloom. But the rain stopped at last, and presently the moon shone through rents in the clouds, and the effect was magical and weird and its pale light wrought strange filagree work amongst the trees.

The excitement that had agitated Strovella had been followed by a corresponding depression, and for two hours he had lain almost perfectly still. His eyes half closed, his lips parted, and his breath coming in jerks. Courrette himself was uneasy now, and he could not sleep, probably because he had slept so much. There was something awe-inspiring in his situation, lying there in that rocky recess in the midst of the vast and lonely forest, and he a hunted fugitive, going he scarcely knew whither, and peril dogging his every footstep. At last he rose and replenished the fire. Its leaping flames had a tendency to cheer. As he returned to his sheepskin he heard his name pronounced in a low, solemn tone. It caused him to start for an instant with a

half-formed superstitious fear. Then turning to his friend he said—

“Did you speak?”


“Yes”—this feebly—“Come and lie down beside me. I feel that the end is approaching, and I must tell you something. I’ve come to the conclusion that there is—I *feel* that there is—a God, and I would make my peace with Him.”

“Well, can I be of any service to you?” Courrette asked, feeling far from comfortable, for this was an ordeal to him, and he scarcely knew how to comport himself.

“Yes, you can give me some consolation—the consolation of our common Church. Listen to me till I tell you an incident in my career. I must go back about twenty-five years, at the time I was in Switzerland. I had been a wild, restless sort of youth, and I soon got mixed up with Nihilists and Socialists, and thoroughly imbued with their doctrines. I carried with me to Geneva a letter of introduction to a man named Paulitschke, a Polish exile.

“I know Paulitschke,” said Courrette, quickly. “He is or was president of the Société de la Liberté.”

“I don’t know what he is now, but when I knew him he was a sort of mystery, but it was well known that he was in correspondence with all the Socialistic societies in Europe. He was a downright and uncompromising Socialist; a half mad, and certainly a fanatical enthusiast. Through him I soon made acquaintances, and, entering heartily into the cause of Nihilism, I found I could live without my trade, for money there was in unlimited quantities, but where it came from I never knew. At this time there came to reside in Geneva a Count Matriskie and his wife with their one child, a boy. Matriskie was a Polish exile also and had lived in various places in Europe. How he became allied with the Nihilists I never knew; but he was a scientific man, and an amateur chemist of great skill, and he was on this account considered to be a valuable addition to our



ranks. But his fidelity was doubted, and his wife was looked upon with grave suspicion. It was thought, but whether justifiably or not I don't know, that these people had joined us in order to gain information, which they would supply to the Russian Government, as the price of his exile being cancelled. The result was they were narrowly watched, and the reports that were made about them from time to time seemed to confirm the suspicions. Indeed, certain words that his wife let drop and which were overheard left no doubt that they both contemplated exposing a plot we were then engaged in. At length I was summoned to a secret meeting at which it was unanimously decided that the Count must die, and I was one of the three appointed to assassinate him.

"And did you do it?" asked Courrette quickly, as a shudder thrilled him.

"Yes. The Count, under some pretence or other, was lured into a boat at midnight. I and my companions pulled half way across the Lake of Geneva, where we strangled the Count, and threw his body into the water. A day or two later the corpse was found by the police, and taken to the Morgue. We had removed every trace of identification from the body, so it was exposed to public view. While it was thus on view the Countess in disguise came to see the body of her husband, though she had no intention of laying claim to it, for she was afraid, fearing the vengeance of the Nihilists. But she was seen to kiss the face of the corpse by our spies, and as it was considered that this would lead to our betrayal, it was resolved that she should die also. And so I followed her from the Morgue until she reached a lonely road, where I shot her in accordance with my orders."

"This is an awful story," Courrette remarked, with a sigh.

"Yes, horrible. I have never got the blood of that poor lady and her husband out of my eyes, nor their groans out of my ears," said Strovellé, with a shudder.

"And what became of their boy?"

"I don't know. It was intended that he should be placed under the care of Paulitschke, and brought up as a Nihilist. But this plan was frustrated, for the boy was carried off by the servants, and nothing more has ever been heard of him."


It had cost Strovelle a great deal of effort to tell the story of this terrible tragedy, and that effort had exhausted him, so that it seemed as if every breath would be his last. The effect on Courrette was exceedingly depressing, and he went outside and walked up and down for nearly half-an-hour. Although he deemed himself callous, and although he knew that the creed of Nihilism admitted no pity for those who were considered to be traitors, he was nevertheless conscious of the fact that his feeling for Strovelle had undergone some revulsion, but he resolved not to show this or say one word to the dying man that might add a pang to his last moments.

When he went in again he found Strovelle gasping very much, and every now and then the wretched man groaned with the mental anguish that tortured him. He put out his emaciated hand and grasped his companion's, saying the while—

"I have called you several times, but I suppose you couldn't hear me. My voice is too weak. I should like to live, but it cannot be, I suppose. I'm doomed. It's hard to have to die here in this howling solitude as if one were a wild animal."

He seemed much moved. All his hardness and callousness had left him, and he was softened and humbled. Courrette could do nothing and say but little. He could not adapt himself to the situation. He felt awkward and stupid.

"You had better try and go to sleep now," he remarked, wishing to put an end to the scene. "Yes to sleep," murmured the dying man; "*To sleep*. The only sleep where



dreams vex not, and where human hate can affect us no more."

Courrette made no reply. He was too much troubled with his own bitter thoughts. For some time he sat and watched his companion who every now and then became delirious and rambled incoherently. At last an irresistible drowsiness stole upon the watcher, and stretching himself out on his sheepskin he had soon sunk into a deep sleep, and was unmindful of all around him.

CHAPTER XL.

INTO THE JAWS OF THE LION.

WHEN Courrette awoke it was broad daylight, but heavy wreaths of mist filled the forest, and clung in strips to the trees like gauzy film. He turned to his companion, and found him still living, but unconsciousness had supervened, and he was lying with his glazed eyes staring blankly up to the rock vault. It was evident that sensibility to pain had ceased, for though his arm was terribly swollen, being three times its natural size, while the inflammation had extended to the tips of the fingers, he gave no indication of any suffering, mortification, in fact, had made rapid progress, and so the pain had left him. He was perfectly tranquil, and his breath came slowly and fitfully, marking the nearness of the end.

Courrette spoke to him, but he returned no answer, nor was he able to swallow some morsels of food his companion placed between his lips. Courrette saw that he could do nothing more, though he would not continue the journey until the man was dead. It was terribly trying, and he felt he could not endure the strain much longer, but would himself fall ill unless a change came. He was therefore extremely anxious to push on and reach some place where he would not only be safe from recapture, but would be able to recoup his exhausted strength and energies by good food and proper rest.

In this hour of his suffering his thoughts, as were natural,

turned to Rebecca Cohen, and he wondered if he was fated to meet her again. He knew now how closely she had woven herself about his heart, and he puzzled and racked his brain trying to furnish some plausible reason to account for her refusing him, seeing, as was obvious, that she loved him. For surely a woman who did not love a man could not behave to him and talk to him as she had done.

And from Rebecca his thoughts wandered to Bertha Schmidt ; but remembrance of her made him feel bitter and passionate, for all his sufferings and his hardships were attributable to her.

"Perhaps the day will come yet," he muttered angrily, "when I shall be able to humble her into the dust. And if ever it does, she shall know no pity from me. She crushed me, and I will crush her, if ever I get the chance. Had she treated me differently how much smoother my life might have been. As it is now what will the end be? Heaven knows? I am going from horror and danger to what? Maybe more misery lies before me than behind me, and I almost wish I was as Strovelle is."

In order to distract his thoughts he sprang up, and went out into the forest, and wandered about aimlessly and ill at ease, until at last it occurred to him to go and see the old charcoal burner again, as he might be able to obtain from her some information as to the best route to pursue. He accordingly turned his steps in the direction of the clearing, though it was not without difficulty that he found it, and when he did was a little alarmed to see that a man was attending to the baking wood. But as he was a harmless and sickly-looking man Courrette advanced towards him boldly, and he was no less surprised and alarmed than the woman had been. The woman, as Courrette subsequently learned, was his wife.

When the man had recovered from his surprise he seemed disposed to be talkative, though there was something in his manner that was very far from inspiring confidence in Cour-

rette. After a time he invited the visitor to his hut, where his wife was still busy spinning flax, and the half idiot boy was still lying on the skins. When this youth saw who the new-comer was he seemed to be shaken with passion, and he glared and hissed like an enraged snake.

The charcoal burner and his wife spoke together in their language, which was strange to Courrette, and presently the man turned sharply to him and exclaimed—

"Thou hast been here before?"

"Yes, I came here yesterday in a starving condition and bought food from your wife."

"And whither goest thou?"

"I am travelling to Persia."

The man grinned and said—

"That is a long journey, and those who travel towards Persia as thou art doing have generally come from the mines and the chains of the far north."

Courrette understood perfectly well what he meant, and so made answer boldly—

"True, and that is where I have come from."

"Hast thou got any money?" asked the man.

Courrette hesitated for a moment, then said—

"Those who come from the mines and the chains are not likely to have money."

The man grinned again as he answered—

"Thou art wrong. Those who get clear are generally well provided. Now listen, if thou hast ten roubles I'll undertake to guide thee by a near route to the frontier, and if thou hast not a guide thou wilt certainly perish by the way for the country is beset with perils."

Courrette was struck by this suggestion, and it seemed to him that he couldn't do better than accept the man's offer as he had still a few roubles left, but he did not exactly know how many. He kept his money in a handkerchief tied round his body, and undoing the handkerchief he counted the money and found there was but seven roubles.

"I have but seven," he said, "that will I give you if you will guide me."

The man's eyes glistened with greedy eagerness, and exchanging some hurried words with his wife and son, he answered—"Good. I'll go with thee for seven roubles."

"How far is it to the frontier?" asked Courrette.

"Three days the way I shall take thee."

"And when shall we start?"

"When thou wilt."

"Good. I will return shortly and let you know," Courrette said as he rose to go, for he felt that he dare not depart until the life was out of his companion's body, and so he went back to where he had left the dying Strovelle, expecting to find him dead. But this was not the case, for though in a pitiable condition, he still lingered.


Courrette was surprised and even sorry that this was so, for, as he could do nothing for the unfortunate man, and his recovery was impossible, it was better that his sufferings should end. It was marvellous, indeed, how he had held out so long, seeing that he had partaken of no nourishment for several days. As it was, he was an absolute skeleton, and his face and skull had all the appearance of a death's-head. For the flesh had shrivelled up, and the skin clung tightly to the bones. The sight was ghastly in the extreme, and it was rendered even more ghastly because life remained. The man was nothing more than a living corpse. Courrette, who was much moved, knelt down beside his wretched companion and spoke to him. In a few moments the sunken, glazed eyes seemed to brighten slightly, as though the dying man recognized the speaker, and then, prompted by some sudden impulse which he could not account for, Courrette bent down until his lips were close to the ear of Strovelle, and in this position he repeated a prayer that is part of the Roman Catholic Litany for the Dying. As it proceeded an expression of joy spread itself over the corpse-like face, and a light of intelligence shone in the eyes. But he uttered no word.

The power of speech had gone, and in a little while the eyes grew filmy again, and apparently a complete collapse set in. And yet he lingered on through the day, and when darkness came he was still living.

Courrette shrank instinctively away from the animated skeleton, and, rolling himself in his sheepskin at the mouth of the cavern, he fell asleep.

He slept soundly, and did not awaken until the day had dawned. Then he crept in to look at Strovelle, and found that the end had come at last. The unfortunate man was unmistakably dead. His jaw had fallen, and his glassy eyes were staring blindly upwards. Courrette uttered a sigh of relief, and felt truly thankful that the suspense was over at last. He knelt for a moment or two, crossed himself, muttered a silent prayer, and then arose, and covered the ghastly face with part of the sheepskin on which the body lay. He next, with infinite labour, rolled some large stones to the mouth of what was now a tomb. He thus filled up the entrance as well as he could. And his task completed, he turned sorrowfully away, leaving his friend lying there in that vast solitude. And unless wild animals managed to break in, the dead man would lie undisturbed, for no passer-by would think that beneath these piled-up stones the body of a human being was mouldering to dust. Besides in the course of time no doubt other stones would fall from the cliffs above and add to the dead man's monument.

It was a fitting resting-place there where human beings so seldom trod, and nature was savage and untamed, for the man whose life had been filled with the lurid stormlight of passion. He had stained his hands with human blood, and had committed a cruel and unpardonable crime. But he had suffered torture and hardships of no ordinary kind ; and for years and years he had been haunted almost into madness by the shadows of his victims ; and at last had died a horrible and lingering death in a hole in the rocks, like a wounded beast in its lair,



Courrette did not, of course, view the matter in this light, although, after the confession, he did not feel such a warm attachment to his friend as he had done before ; he was nevertheless disposed to make every allowance, knowing as he did that those who entered the ranks of Nihilism were bound to follow out its mandates, even to the shedding of blood. So having done all he could for his dead companion, he turned away with sincere feelings of sorrow, and went direct to the hut of the charcoal burner. So anxious was he to get out of that cursed country, and place the frontier between him and his enemies, that he insisted on starting immediately, although the charcoal burner wanted to delay setting out for some hours, on the plea that he had to cut some wood for his wife to convert into charcoal during his absence. Urged by Courrette, however, he hurriedly put up some food in a bag, which he slung over his shoulders, and then, armed with a stout staff, a formidable hunting-knife, which he carried in a leather sheath attached to his belt, and a long barrel flint-lock gun, he announced himself ready.

He was by no means a prepossessing man, or one calculated to inspire confidence by his appearance ; for his brown wrinkled face had a savage and animal-like expression, that was heightened by his cunning, almond-shaped eyes, which were as restless as a hyena's. His long, rope-like hair hung in a matted tangle about his forehead and down his back. He wore a small skin cap something like a fez, and a short coat of sheepskin, and baggy trousers, made of stout canvas, and tied at the ankles. His feet were enveloped in the fur of some animal, and thrust into heavy wooden sabots.

Courrette could not help viewing his man with suspicion, solely, perhaps, on account of his bandit-like appearance. Nor was this suspicion lessened when the fellow demanded his payment in advance. At first Courrette refused, but as the man was resolute, and refused to budge until he had got

the money, Courrette somewhat reluctantly gave it to him, and he immediately handed it to his wife. This little affair settled, they commenced their journey, and continued for some hours without scarcely speaking, for the guide was a sullen and morose man, and seemed perfectly indisposed to talk. As night fell they encamped in an exceedingly wild and desolate region, on the bank of a small and turbulent river that flowed with a tremendous roaring and hissing through a tortuous, rocky channel, that in places narrowed to a mere chasm.

For some reason, which he could not altogether account for, Courrette's suspicions of his guide had deepened as they proceeded, and now as they sat together over their fire, and broiled some dried bears' steaks, he felt a positive mistrust of him, for he looked so murderous and savage as the firelight played upon his strange face.

When the frugal meal was finished, the guide performed his evening devotions, then rolled himself in his sheepskin by the fire, suggesting that his companion should do the same. But Courrette did not do this, for, thinking that his throat might be cut by the barbarian, he resolved to watch him, and did so for hours, although the man slept like a hybernating animal steeped in winter sleep, and snorted like a grampus. At last, unable longer to keep awake, Courrette rolled himself up, and slept too.

The sun had risen well when his companion awoke him. He had already prepared a bowl of tea and broiled a steak, so that Courrette came to the conclusion, as his throat was uncut, that he had been wronging the man, who, in spite of his ferocious and murderous-looking appearance, was not, perhaps, a bad man after all.¹

¹ Tea is largely drunk by the natives of these regions, and when travelling they almost invariably carry a small bagful with them, together with a small copper bowl for brewing it in. The inhabitants of the whole region, which is very sparsely populated, in the neighbourhood of the Altai Mountains are fierce and treacherous, especially to foreigners, whom they mistrust and hate. They are for the most part of Mongolian origin.—*The Author*.

That day their rate of progress was slow, owing to the wild and rugged character of the country, and Courrette now saw that without a guide he would have had great difficulty in proceeding.

For three days more they continued journeying to the west, and at the end of the third day encamped on the banks of a lonely lake. By this time Courrette's mistrust of his guide had given place to confidence in him, and this confidence was strengthened when the man announced that they were now on the frontier line, and on the morrow they would be in Turkestan.

They cooked their last supply of food for their supper, and when it was eaten the guide announced his intention of visiting a small village about a league away, where he had some relatives, and would be able to replenish the food bag. He promised to be back before daylight, and so Courrette wished him good-night, and, rolling himself in his sheep-skin, soon fell asleep.

Fearing no danger, he slept soundly until he was awakened by the sound of voices. The stars were just beginning to pale before the coming day, and the fire had smouldered down into a mass of white ashes. He started up and beheld in the uncertain light the figures of several men. Thinking that they were robbers, he sprang to his feet and attempted to draw his pistol. But it was too late. He was suddenly seized in a powerful grip, and before he could offer the slightest resistance his arms were bound to his sides with ropes.


He was in the hands, not of robbers, but of Russian soldiers, and the charcoal burner, for the sake of the Government reward, had betrayed him.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE MAN.

As the threads of this narrative are necessarily linked together—or, what is perhaps a better way of putting it, they run in lines that all converge towards a given point—and as each thread is essential to and has a bearing upon the other, we must leave Joseph Courrette in the hands of his captors for the time being, and return to St. Petersburg, in order to follow the fortunes of Rebecca Cohen.

As can be very easily imagined, her quarrel with Kalnoky did not tend to bring her peace of mind. She had openly defied him, knowing the while that he held in his possession a paper that, if he chose to use it, would consign her and her father to Siberia. The fortunes of her house seemed to be toppling to their fall; and unless she made her peace with Kalnoky all was lost. But how could she do that? He had already insulted her so grossly that she burned with indignation when she even thought of it; and if she made overtures to him, would he not jump to the conclusion that he had conquered her? and she had only too good a reason to suppose that as a triumphant enemy he would show no pity for her honour or self-respect. The dislike for him which she had conceived long ago had now become hatred, so deep-rooted that she shuddered at the bare idea of having to plead to him for favour. And yet she felt as if she must do something to prevent him from carrying his threat into execution.



No more painful position for a woman to be placed in than that in which Rebecca found herself could be conceived. For by her own indiscretion she was absolutely in the toils of this man, and she saw no means of breaking away from him. He was not the man to be moved by sentiment or reached by passionate appeal. If her own ruin only had been in question she could have viewed it with more equanimity ; but her father was involved. And whatever his faults might be, he had been to her an ideal father, and it broke her heart to think what he would suffer should Kalnoky proceed to extremes. A whole fortnight passed, during which she endured such mental anxiety that she was threatened with serious illness. But as Kalnoky had remained silent all this time, she began at last to breathe a little more freely, thinking that he, perhaps, had relented. This idea, however, was soon rudely dispelled, for she met him by accident one evening as she was returning from the town, and he said to her coarsely—

"Rebecca, my patience has a limit, and that limit has been reached. I have been expecting during the past two weeks that you would show some disposition to come down from the lofty pinnacle on which you have placed yourself. But you have chosen to preserve a provoking silence, which in view of the power I hold over you, is, to say the least, indiscreet. If you hadn't by your deceitful arts and whiles made me a tool for releasing your lover, Courrette, I might have been more lenient ; but, as it is, I do not feel that I ought to show you more consideration than you have shown for me."

His words and manner made her blood boil, and she had great difficulty in preventing herself from telling him how thoroughly she detested him. He saw how deeply she was moved, for, before she could speak, he added—

"You needn't let your temper run away with you. I don't know that I am a worse man than Courrette, and very likely I am infinitely better. At any rate, you have to

choose between me and ruin, for you need not think for a moment that I am going to let you off."

These constant and taunting references to Courrette stung her beyond endurance, and, turning upon him fiercely, she exclaimed—

"You must have strange notions of women if you think any woman is to be won by bullying and cowardice. I have already told you that for me to be your wife is impossible, for I am a wife already; and before I would be your mistress I would suffer death a hundred times."

She left him standing there surprised and maddened by her determination, and he said with a fierce sort of growl—


"You defy me, do you, Madame? Well, we'll see which is the stronger of the two."

When Rebecca reached her home she was in a state of feverish agitation, and she was resolved that, let the consequences be what they might, she would take her father into her confidence, and lay the whole matter before him. She lost no time in doing this, and he heard the story with amazement and alarm. But he uttered no reproach, and remarked quietly—

"This is a serious affair, Rebecca, though every man has his price, and Kalnoky may be bought. I may have to make a big sacrifice, but I will see what can be done."

That very evening he sent a message to Kalnoky asking him to come to him, and when he came, he said—"My daughter has told me all that has passed between you both and the threats you have made. That these threats have been made seriously I cannot believe, for surely you can have no interest to serve in being our enemy, and no wish to utterly destroy us. The paper my daughter has been foolish enough to give you has a value. Name the value and I will pay you, for since you are the conqueror I must make terms with you."

A peculiar and malicious smile wreathed itself about Kalnoky's mouth as he answered—



"My price is soon named—your daughter."

The old man fired up at this, even as Rebecca herself had fired up, and he exclaimed—

"If this is a joke it is not a pleasant one. And if it is not a joke you are a blackguard to suppose for an instant that, even as the price of my liberty, I will barter away my daughter's honour."

Kalnoky drew himself up scornfully, and, folding his arms on his breast, he said with great deliberateness—"You don't know me yet, if you think I am to be turned from my purpose. My determination is inflexible. My will is iron. Make what you like of that assertion."

"Will money not buy your silence?" asked the old man hoarsely.

"No, not if you offer me every rouble you possess in the world."

The old Jew could no longer control himself, and, turning almost savagely upon this self-possessed villain, he cried—

"You are a despicable coward."

"So your daughter has already told me," answered Kalnoky, undisturbed by the other's wrath.

"And I emphasize it, and repeat it, and thrust it down your throat," exclaimed Cohen, trembling with passion. "If my daughter's honour is the only thing that will purchase your good will, I declare in the sight of Heaven, and in the name of the God of Israel, that it will never be paid. Go, and do your worst. But hearken, Alexander Kalnoky—so sure as I fall through your instrumentality, so sure will my friends exact from you a terrible revenge. You may crush me, I, who am a weak old man, and my daughter who is a defenceless woman. But you cannot crush, nor all the powers in Russia cannot crush, Nihilism. Its ramifications are too widespread; its eyes are too many; its might too unbreakable, and you may take it from me that the world is not big enough to shelter you from its deadly vengeance."

Kalnoky paled a little, for there was something terribly impressive in the old man's manner, something prophetic in his wrath—but beyond this paleness he gave no sign of being affected, and he said—

"You have lost your head, and are therefore not fit to argue."

"I am fit to argue with a man who wishes to buy my daughter's honour."

"You are taking an extreme view," said Kalnoky, for the first time showing some excitement. "Rebecca has played with me; she has made a tool of me. Though she knew she was a married woman, she encouraged my advances, in order that she might set free her lover, Joseph Courrette."


Cohen's eyes blazed up, and his patriarchal face, with its long, white, flowing beard, was terrible in its expression of righteous anger. He raised his hands above his grey head, as if invoking the wrath of heaven, and, stretching himself out, he advanced a few steps until he was directly in front of and close to Kalnoky. Then, in a voice husky with emotion and passion, he exclaimed—

"You lie, villain, and I call down a curse from heaven upon you. May your eyes become sightless and your tongue be paralyzed. My daughter has not encouraged your advances, and Courrette is not her lover."

Kalnoky seemed amazed, and moved back a little, while an ashy greyness spread over his dark face.

"You are mad," he said, with trembling lips, "and I attach no importance to your threats or your curse. When you are in a cooler frame of mind I will talk to you, not before."

Without another word he left the old man's presence, running up against Rebecca in the passage, for she had been in an adjoining room, and, hearing the heated discussion, was hurrying in to take her father's part. She found him in an unusual state of excitement, and with a cry he threw his arms round her neck and wept. Such an exhibition of



weakness was altogether foreign to his nature, and served to show to what an extent his feelings had been played upon.

She led him to a chair and soothed him, and in a little time he recovered his self-possession. She knelt down beside him, and as he smoothed her hair with his trembling hands, he said—

“Rebecca, we have a cold-blooded calculating villain to deal with, and we must be careful. Fortunately, as you know, the largest part of our wealth has been placed out of the country. But still we have too much here to lose, to say nothing of our liberty. We must therefore try and hold this man in check, and endeavour by some means or other to deprive him of his power.”

Rebecca knew that this was very desirable, but its possibility she quite doubted. Kalnoky had shown that he was a man of extraordinary determination, and as he had scornfully rejected offers of money, no other way to reach him seemed open. If that paper which she had given him could only be recovered he might be defied, for her father had such influence and was so widely respected that he might have successfully rebutted mere verbal accusation. But there was the problem to be solved. How *was* the paper to be recovered? If she only knew somebody, some man, she thought, who would deal with Kalnoky, and checkmate him in his own game, he might be rendered harmless. But she knew no one whom she could trust, for to take a third person into the secret was to increase the danger, unless such a person was a Nihilist, and she was perfectly well aware that if Kalnoky's threats and conduct were made known to the Nihilists he would certainly be assassinated, and that may lead to more trouble.

But while she was thus racking her brains, and abandoning herself to despair, the very man she wanted was coming, and within a week of that stormy interview between her father and Kalnoky he had come.

Her father was out one morning when a servant informed

her that a gentleman wished to see her. It was no unusual thing for gentlemen to call, and therefore she was not surprised, but when she learnt who the visitor was she was more than surprised, for it was none other than Herr Rudolph Mosse, from Frankfort-on-the-Main.

CHAPTER XLII.

GIVES SOME CURIOUS INFORMATION ABOUT CERTAIN PERSONS.

IN order to explain Rudolph Mosse's sudden appearance at the house of Solomon Cohen in St. Petersburg, it is important to go back to a point of time antecedent to the commencement of this story.

Mosse was a Jew, and for many years he had been resident in St. Petersburg, and was intimately acquainted with the Cohens. He was a married man with two children, a girl and a boy, his wife being a German-Jewess from Frankfort-on-the-Main, while he himself was a native of Mayence-on-the-Rhine. Herr Mosse's business in St. Petersburg was that of a commission agent, and he was principally engaged in purchasing hides, tallow, and corn for English and German firms. For some years he flourished and prospered, was happy in his domestic relations, and held many prominent local positions of trust, for he had naturalized himself as a Russian. His wife, who was considerably his junior, was renowned for her beauty, a beauty that was fully inherited by his daughter. As the Mosses were hospitable people, and Herr Mosse was fond of company, they attracted a large circle of acquaintances. Madame Mosse enjoyed much liberty, for her husband was neither jealous nor suspicious, and she and her daughter were in the habit of visiting a great deal. Then one day Mosse received an anonymous letter, in which he was warned that his wife was guilty of

conduct which reflected on her own and his honour. It was a proof of the faith Mosse had in his wife at this time, and how affectionately he regarded her, that he did not allow the letter to affect him, but put it into the fire. A month later he received a second anonymous letter to the same purpose, and this one he showed to her, and demanded if there was any truth in the insinuations it contained. She pretended to be highly indignant, stoutly denied the accusations, and vowed that the letter was a villainous and disgraceful slander. And so her husband believed her, burnt that letter too, and expressed a wish that he could discover the anonymous writer, that he might publicly horsewhip him. Mosse at this time was an easy-going man with whom life agreed. He was worldly, undoubtedly. He loved good living, good company, and enjoyed himself; but he was what the world terms "a good fellow." If he had no very shining virtues, he certainly had no very pronounced vices, and he had given striking proof that jealousy did not trouble him. But human happiness is frequently, if not invariably, like a fair seeming apple that is ruddy and sound without, but has a canker at the core. The canker in Mosse's happiness was his wife, and the day came at last when he was to realize this in all its bitterness. For he awoke one morning to find his hearth and home desolated. His wife had eloped, taking her daughter with her. Rumour said that she had gone off with a person of high standing at the Russian Court. Whether this was so or not he never discovered. She left a little note behind saying that life with him had become intolerable, and she could stand it no longer. She requested him not to seek her, for sooner than return she would kill herself.

Mosse did not seek his wife. Those anonymous letters now appeared to him in characters of fire, and perhaps he felt that a woman who could so long and so grossly deceive him was not worth reclaiming. But that he felt her loss nevertheless, and the loss of his daughter, was only too

apparent, and in six months those who knew him expressed astonishment at the wonderful change that had taken place in him. From a young, well-preserved, and fresh-looking man, he had become a worn and old one.

A few months later another terrible blow fell upon him. His son, who was about twelve years of age, had gone on a visit to Cronstadt, and one evening, while boating with some companions, was accidentally drowned.

From this moment Herr Mosse became an utterly altered man. He drank, neglected his business, and as a natural consequence things went wrong.

About the same time he made the acquaintance of a young man known as Claude Oppenheim, who had been in St. Petersburg a few months, ostensibly to study the Russian language. There seemed to be some mystery about Oppenheim, for the gossips could learn very little about him. He was good-looking, with a very attractive manner, and had evidently been well brought up. Although he lived in good style there was evidence that his means were limited ; and it soon became noised abroad that he was getting heavily in debt in the town, though how he managed to obtain people's confidence so as to incur liabilities is one of those things not easily explained. Possibly his taking manner, added to plausible stories, were at the bottom of it. Rumour also said that he was leading a fast and reckless sort of life ; and those good folk who live in the world for no other reason than to poke their noses into other folks' business, set afloat a good many ugly stories about him. Perhaps some of these were true, and a great many of them false.


Oppenheim and Mosse first met by chance in a café, and an intimacy sprang up between them, and it is proof of Oppenheim's powers that in a very short time after the acquaintanceship began he borrowed a considerable sum of money from his new-found friend, although Mosse himself at this time was by no means in a flourishing condition. Still he had something, and the credit of his better days was not

quite exhausted. In fact, had he been disposed to have pulled himself together, as the saying is, he might have reinstated himself, and have found plenty of acquaintances to help him up the ladder once more. But he seemed to have reached a stage of utter indifference, and though he never referred to his troubles, it was self-evident that they preyed upon his mind.

Amongst his former friends who did not desert him in his ill luck were the Cohens, father and daughter. He had known Solomon for many years, and Rebecca from her childhood, and in spite of his changed circumstances and somewhat dissipated habits, he was a frequent visitor at Cohen's house. On one occasion when he went he took Oppenheim with him, and the young man made himself so agreeable that he was invited to come again, an invitation he was not slow to avail himself of. In a few weeks he was a privileged visitor at Cohen's house, and in another few weeks he was secretly making strong love to Rebecca. He was possessed of that dangerous attribute of being able to make himself fascinating to women, and Rebecca fell in love with him.

Whether Herr Mosse was aware of this at the time is not clear. If he was, but it is but fair to say that in all probability he was not, he showed no concern, and asked no questions. At last Solomon began to suspect something, and taxed his daughter with allowing Oppenheim to pay court to her. She made no attempt to deny it, and pleaded to her father to be allowed to continue openly what she had been doing in secret. He was exceedingly angry, and went immediately to Oppenheim to demand from him what his intentions were. What arguments the young man used or what influence he brought to bear is not known, but Cohen went away infinitely less wrathful than when he arrived, and Oppenheim's visits to the Cohens' house were continued with the sanction of the father.

Of course by this time Mosse had been informed of what



was going on, and he expressed an opinion that Oppenheim was an eligible young man. Perhaps Cohen was influenced a little by this, and he consented to the love-making being continued subject to certain restrictions, and to inquiries he intended to make being favourably answered. In the meantime, however, and with the connivance of Herr Mosse, Oppenheim and Rebecca Cohen were secretly married. To keep this secret from Cohen himself was next to impossible, and so he was informed almost immediately. Of course he was angry. What father would not have been? but he was too much attached to his daughter to allow his anger to be of long duration, especially as the anger could not undo what had been done, for the legality of the marriage was beyond dispute. Oppenheim expressed a strong desire that for a time the marriage should not be made public, and his reason for this was that he wanted to reconcile his friends. He stated that his friends held very high social position, and that if they suddenly became aware that he had married without their consent they would cut him. Such influence did he acquire over his father-in-law that this secrecy was agreed to; but Solomon insisted that the young couple should not live together until the marriage was made public.

For some time things went on smoothly enough, and Oppenheim drew considerable sums of money from Cohen, until at last the latter began to demur, and finally to object and decisively refuse to make any further advances. The result was, Oppenheim, who had been living at a considerable rate, found himself seriously embarrassed. At first he tried to cajole Cohen; then he entreated, and finding that of no avail, he became abusive, and at last resorted to menaces. Then, for the first time, Cohen's and his daughter's eyes were opened, and they saw that they had been imposed upon. In the end Oppenheim suddenly disappeared, and was heard of no more.


The blow fell heavily on Rebecca, and perhaps no less

heavily on her father, though it affected them in different ways. She was bowed down with grief, for her honour and her feelings had been outraged. But he grew furious, and vowed vengeance, for his pride had been insulted as it had never been insulted before ; not to speak of the loss of his money, amounting to several thousand roubles. He took various steps to try and discover Oppenheim's whereabouts, but without success. All he did learn was that he had left the country.

It would scarcely have been in accord with human nature if this unhappy affair had not caused unpleasantness between the Cohens and Rudolph Mosse. They blamed him, though with but scant justification, for having led them into it, and all connection between them ceased. Mosse seemed to take the accusation a good deal to heart, for he had been as much deceived as Rebecca and her father had been.

As time went on, Mosse slid more rapidly down the hill. The world is ever ready to kick a fallen man, and Mosse being down, found that he was likely to keep down, unless he raised himself by his own exertions. Probably this truth dawned upon him, for he turned his back upon St. Petersburg and went abroad. He sojourned in London for a time, but did not do any good, and at last, after many vicissitudes, he drifted to Frankfort-on-the-Main, where he set about pulling himself together. He started a business of a very nondescript character, but which he was pleased to term an "Army Agency." His principal business seemed to be lending small sums of money, at usurer's interest to young military officers. His moral character had undergone a change ; and some of his transactions were, to say the least, questionable. He abandoned himself to a sensual kind of life, and was ready to resort to almost any means to obtain money, in order that he might pander to his desires. He certainly did obtain a connection of a kind, for impecuniosity breaks down many barriers.

One day he went to dine with one of his needy clients, a



young officer in a regiment then quartered in Frankfort. They betook themselves to a well-known Bier halle that was much frequented by military men. And while there the young officer suddenly exclaimed, looking across to another table—

“Why, I declare, there’s my old friend Count von Arenberg, whom I haven’t seen for an age.”

Glancing in the direction indicated, Mosse turned various colours as he said excitedly—

“Do you mean that fair man with the moustache?”

“Yes.”

“Herr God, that’s a fellow I knew in Russia, and his name’s Oppenheim!”

Directly Mosse had given expression to his statement he regretted it, and in order to counteract the effect of his words on his companion, he said—

“Oh, no, I am mistaken. That young fellow wears the uniform of — Regiment, and all the officers in that regiment are gentlemen.”

Mosse knew, however, that he was not mistaken, for the person designated Count von Arenberg was the Oppenheim of St. Petersburg. But whereas Oppenheim was an assumed name, the Count was not, and Mosse was shrewd enough—and quick enough—to see this; for he was well aware that a man could not hold a military commission under a false name, and he thought to himself—

“So, so, my fine young cub, I see to the bottom of you. You came to Russia to sow your wild oats, did you, and youthful folly led you into an act of rascality that caused you to bolt, and to forget to leave your address behind. Well, I possess a valuable secret of yours, and I’ll use it with some effect upon you, or my name is not what it is.”

Then turning to his companion, he said—

“I should like to have an introduction to your friend.”

“Good. Come, and I’ll introduce you.”

So the two rose from their table and crossed over to the

other table where the Count and half-a-dozen companions sat enjoying themselves. The Count's hilarity was speedily turned to a sort of stupefaction as he recognized Mosse. Though he recovered his spirits when Mosse with wonderful tact gave no sign of recognizing him. But by and by, when the little party was breaking up, and the men were putting on their hats and gloves, Mosse whispered in the Count's ear—

“So my good friend, Oppenheim, this is a lucky meeting. You must come and see me. Here's my card. We may be of advantage to each other.”

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE COUNT FLUTTERS LIGHTLY INTO A WEB.

COUNT VON ARENBERG's heart dropped down into his military boots as he caught these words ; for he had actually been fool enough to buoy himself up with the hope that he had escaped recognition. He stammered out a faint—"Yes. I'll come and see you." Then he followed his companions out, and he felt as if he had fallen from a great height and was prostrate at the feet of an enemy against whom he could offer no resistance.

It scarcely needs to be said that Count von Arenberg, *alias* Claude Oppenheim, was an unprincipled vagabond. That is the plain language right-minded men would use in speaking of a person who had been guilty of such dastardly deception, whatever his station in life might be, whether count or peasant, and as a matter of fact it exactly expresses the Count's character. He *was* unprincipled. Born with patrician tastes and ideas, but inheriting the purse of a pauper, he had early to struggle against difficulties, and this would seem to have blunted all his moral sensitiveness, and he was ready to resort to anything that would bring him money. He was essentially a spendthrift, for as soon as he got money his aim was to spend it ; but, as is often the case with such men, he had the miser's craving for money, but not the miser's love of hoarding. He was proud, too, or rather vain, for there is an infinite difference between pride and vanity, and he aimed at keeping up a position which

was totally beyond his means. He gambled a good deal, and managed occasionally to win considerable sums of money, but as his gains were about counterbalanced by his losses, he was always in low water, and in the hands of the money-lenders. He was possessed of the peculiar faculty of rapidly making acquaintances, and as there was something fascinating about him, he attracted people to him. He knew his power in this respect, and he used it skilfully. But it was almost certain that before a person had known Count von Arenberg three months, such person, if he had any money, would be the Count's creditor. In fact, the Count's life was one great scheme as to how he should obtain from Peter in order that the demands of Paul might be satisfied.

Such, then, was the Count von Arenberg's position when he met so unexpectedly his old St. Petersburg acquaintance, Rudolph Mosse.

As the Count returned to his barracks after that meeting he was in a very gloomy frame of mind, for he knew that his fate was in Mosse's hands. For some few minutes he contemplated suicide as the readiest and best way out of his difficulties. But he had not the stability of purpose nor the determination of despair which is necessary for self-destruction. He was too sanguine ; too much of a coward, and in his own way enjoyed life too well. He, therefore, soon thrust the idea of suicide out of the way, and resolved to put a bold face on the matter ; and if there was a man who knew how to practise unblushing effrontery that man was Count von Arenberg.

Two days passed before he was able to call at the offices of his once friend, Herr Rudolph Mosse.

Herr Mosse's offices consisted of three neat rooms *en suite*. One of them was fitted with desks and high stools, on which were perched two small clerks and a big one. The united ages of the small ones did not tot up to thirty, while the big one was verging on fourscore. There was an im-

posing array of ledgers, plenty of inkstands, and all the etceteras that go to make up a counting-house. The place had a business air, but whether its occupier did much business was another thing. The other two rooms were the sanctum of the master, and a private room for receiving clients.

On sending his name up the Count was at once ushered in by one of the aforementioned small clerks, with many a smirk and bow; for as he knew nothing of the Count's history past or present, he looked upon him as a new catch, and possibly a profitable one. For a Count and a military officer *ought*, according to the small clerk's way of thinking, to be worth lending money to.

Herr Mosse was ensconced in a large leather-lined chair that revolved on a pivot, so that with very little exertion he was enabled to spin round to see who his visitors were. It was seldom that Herr Mosse rose to greet any one, however high his social status, for Herr Mosse was inordinately stout, and to rise and sit down again was a tax. But there were times, when it suited him, when he could be remarkably agile. This agility, however, depended upon many things.

As the Count entered, Herr Mosse described the segment of a circle with his revolving chair, and said in a very off-handed sort of way—

"Well, young man, so you have condescended to visit me?"

"Yes. But how do we meet? As friends or enemies?"

"That depends upon yourself. But sit down, and join me in a cigar. They are good ones. Possibly better than you are in the habit of smoking."

"Spare your irony," said the Count, as he helped himself from the proffered box. "You at any rate seem to be flourishing?"

"*Seem!* Yes. There is a good deal of seeming in this world." This with a side-long glance at the Count. "It is, in fact, a world of shams, and few men are really what they

seem. Beneath the crust there is generally a good deal of rottenness. But what have you been doing since I had the pleasure of seeing you last? Have you married again?"

"No," answered the Count with emphasis, and turning a little pale. "That Russian incident was an unfortunate affair——"

"It was," put in Mosse, as he leaned his head back in his chair, and blew two streams of smoke from his nostrils.

"Yes; but I don't quite mean in the way that you mean. It was an unfortunate affair for me, as I soon began to realize, and looking upon it in the light of an escapade——"

Mosse sat bolt upright, slewed himself round until he faced the other, then said—

"Well, you are a cool-blooded scoundrel, of that there is no doubt. An escapade! Eh? An escapade to marry a beautiful girl, bleed her father of a large sum of money, and then bolt, without leaving your address behind. An escapade! Ach Gott, if that's an escapade I should like to have some definition of deep scheming villainy and diabolical deception."

The Count was very white now, and he exhibited uneasiness under this blunt speaking.

"So I am to look upon you in the light of an enemy then?" he remarked a little hoarsely.

"I don't know that I have much cause to be your friend and I have no particular wish to be your enemy," answered Mosse.

The Count caught a ray of hope from this, and exclaimed with a show of emotional pathos—

"Perhaps you would judge my act less severely if you knew all the circumstances that drove me into it. And, moreover, I really loved the girl, and have never ceased to pine for her. But I was driven by an inexorable Fate to do as I did——"

"Bosh!" exclaimed Mosse, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously, "don't talk such confounded nonsense as that

to me. I am a man of the world, not a greenhorn to be gulled with bunkum. You asked me whether I was going to be your friend or enemy. I told you that depended on yourself; but you may rest assured, if you treat me as if I were an ass, I shall be a very bad enemy to you, indeed. I don't like being treated like an ass."

"What the devil do you wish me to do?" exclaimed the Count irritably.

"I want you to be an honest rogue at least," retorted Mosse. "Don't try to paint yourself as a saint when you know you are a sinner. And don't try to wriggle out of your position with a whine of innocence when you are perfectly aware you are guilty."

The Count knit his brow with vexation. The plain speaking struck at his vanity, and that was tender. But after all it is very possible that he had some notion that he was really the injured person, and that his unfortunate wife in St. Petersburg was entirely to blame. Some men can persuade themselves into anything; and no doubt the condemned murderer, when he comes to the scaffold, frequently feels that he does not deserve such harsh treatment, since it was Fate that drove him to commit the murder. One thing the Count saw very clearly, he could not trifle with nor throw dirt in the eyes of the man before him, and so he said—

"Well, I'll own then to being a sinner as black as you like. What then?"

"Ah, now then we shall get on better," exclaimed Mosse, with a chuckle. "There is nothing like open confession. It does the soul good, you know."

"I would venture to remark that we are both tarred with the same brush," added the Count, spitefully.

"Ah, yes, that's true," said Mosse, with a cynical laugh; "but it's a truth with a difference. You were born a rascal, but I have been made what I am by circumstances, well calculated to turn any man into a demon."

The Count sprang up from his seat. He was very red and excited, and he blustered out—

"Look here, I did not come here to be insulted by you, and I will see you hanged first before I stand it!"

He was about to turn on his heel and walk away, when, without rising from his seat, Mosse caught him by the wrist and detained him.

"Stay," he said, quietly, but determinedly. "Don't try your bounce on me, young fellow. It won't do. To the outside world you are Count von Arenberg. To me you are —. Well, you know what I know. Now be rational, or I'll denounce you just as certainly as you have got a head on your shoulders."

The Count resumed his seat sullenly.

"If you won't get excited," Mosse continued, "we shall make headway. Now let us examine our respective positions. You represent yourself to be one thing, and I know you to be another. Good. I am prepared to keep your secret, on condition that you help me. I want to make money, and I am going to make it somehow or other. I have thrown scruples overboard. A man who wants to flourish nowadays in face of the keen competition which meets him on every side mustn't burden himself with scruples. I've got a little money to lend, and I'll lend some of it to you, if you like. But what I want you to do is to introduce profitable customers to me. You shall in fact be my jackal. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said the Count, with a sneer. "I am to find the victims that you are to fleece."

"Do not put it in that unpleasant way," returned Mosse. "There is no fleecing in the case. There are impecunious people who want to borrow money, and I want to lend it to them. These people are prepared to pay good interest, and good interest must be paid when the security is risky. But I prefer to have dealings with military officers. Now, do you see where you can be useful!"

"Perfectly."

"Very well. Now you are a man of tact, as you proved by your little exploits in Russia, and therefore you can be trusted to go into this business with discretion and prudence, and I shall make it profitable to you."

"I understand. I am to get a share of the plunder."

"No, not plunder. Be careful in your choice of words. No one is to be plundered. But you shall have a proportionate share of the profits."

"That's all right," said the Count. "You can rely upon me doing what I can. But you said just now that you would lend me some of your money. I will take you at your word. I am one of the impecunious fraternity at present. In fact, I am in difficulties."

"That's your chronic condition," Mosse remarked ironically. "It would be a very remarkable thing if you were not in difficulties. But now tell me how much do you want."

The Count hesitated for some moments as though he was not quite sure whether he was being made a fool of or not. Then with some timidity he said—

"Well, will you lend me a thousand marks?"

"Certainly." Mosse struck a handbell on his desk, and a small clerk appeared. "Draw a bill on Count von Arenberg at three months for one thousand two hundred and fifty marks."

The Count seemed amazed, but he stammered—

"I said a thousand marks."

"I know you did," returned Mosse, "and that's what I am going to give you."

"And the two hundred and fifty represent interest?"

"Precisely."

The Count was about to urge some objection when the small clerk returned with the bill.

"Accept that," said Mosse when he had glanced over it, and laid it on his desk before the Count, and then turning

himself round in his chair so that he was able to open the door of a small safe, he took out notes to the value of a thousand marks.

At first the Count hesitated to put his acceptance on the bill, in view of the enormous rate of interest that the vendor was charging. But the sight of the notes tempted him to his fall. Utterly weak in purpose, and wanting in anything like stability of character, he could not possibly resist such a temptation as that, for he was in serious difficulties and had been puzzling his brains for days in his endeavour to devise some means of getting out of his difficulties. And now here was the no inconsiderable sum of a thousand marks to his hand ready for the taking. What astonished him was the willing manner in which Mosse made the advance. But he did not pause for any further reflection. He thrust a pen into the inkpot, and in a rapid scrawl with innumerable flourishes as became a Count, he wrote his acceptance on the bill, and tossed it to Mosse, who examined it critically, passed a blotting roller over it, and then locked it up in his safe.

"So," he said, proceeding to light another cigar, "that's all right. We shall be able to get on now."

The Count felt a little uneasy. He had some sort of vague idea that he had fluttered lightly into a net, and that, however much he might struggle, he would not get out again.

He took up the notes, folded them and put them carefully into his pocketbook. They at least would float him for a short time, and he could give a few snug little feeds to some of his chosen companions. And so accepting another cigar he shook hands with Mosse and left him, and when he had gone Mosse smiled and muttered—

"I think, young man, I've pinned you pretty securely, anyhow."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE COUNT'S BÊTE NOIR.

HERR RUDOLPH MOSSE was a speculative man, and the thousand marks he had advanced to the Count was purely a speculation, although he knew that he was not in the least likely to lose his money. It would not answer the Count's purpose to compromise his position for so small a sum. But, moreover, Mosse did not care much about the thousand marks ; what he did want was to get custom through the Count's influence. The Count, *being* a Count and a military officer to boot, was the centre of a little coterie of admirers, who were ever ready to do as he bade them.* Mosse, having thrown his scruples overboard, as he had expressed it, was desirous of making money, but in a legitimate way, and his idea of a legitimate way was charging enormous interest for what he did lend. The three months during which the Count's bill had to run soon passed. One has only to put one's name to a bill to find out with what express speed time really does travel. When the Count became aware that his acceptance had matured he was

* It need scarcely be said that Counts and Princes in Germany are as plentiful as blackberries. While many of these Countlings and Princelings represent really good though decayed families, a number of them are mere nonentities with no pedigrees whatever, and nearly all are more or less impecunious. Nevertheless, and although this is a well-known fact, these Counts and Princes are looked up to throughout the Fatherland with a feeling amounting to reverence, notwithstanding that numbers of them eke out an existence in a very questionable way.—*The Author.*

annoyed and startled, and not being provided with the capital and interest to discharge the debt, he went off in post-haste to Mosse.

Mosse smiled when he had listened to the stammered excuses and pleadings for time, and he said blandly—

"Of course, we will renew the bill on your paying the interest. But let me remind you, Count, that during the past three months I might not have had any existence for all the notice you have taken of me. That's ingratitude, you know. But you'll do better, you *must* do better during the ensuing three months."

The Count did not fail to mark the significance of that "must," and he knew what it meant. And accordingly he did do better, and was the means of placing a good deal of custom in Mosse's way. The bond of union between the two men was not of a character to beget friendship. Mosse looked upon the Count with contempt. He considered him a poor weak fool, while the Count hated Mosse, and at the same time feared him. For when one man is in another man's power, the one who wields the power is almost invariably hated by the other.

The Count knew only too well that Mosse must ever be a standing menace to him, but he was not in a position to shake him off, and therefore must endure him. But there was this to be said, however disagreeable the connection was, the Count had no appearance of suffering much from it. He was as reckless as ever. He took life lightly, and frittered it away as small-brained men will. He had no ambition to write his name on the pages of history. He was content to live in the "to-day," and had no care for the future except so far as it might supply his wants. He was luxurious in his habits and ideas. He drank beer by the bucketful, as became a true German, and he played cards with a zest quite worthy of his nationality. And so, what with his military duties, and the many calls upon his time for eating, beer-drinking parties, card and billiard-playing,

he never had any leisure, and the weeks and months drifted rapidly away. As his ideas about money were exceedingly vague, and as he never troubled himself about the large balance on the wrong side between his income and his expenditure, he was ever in hot water, as the saying is, but Mosse generally proved his sheet anchor, though the time came at last when Mosse got dissatisfied. He did not obtain sufficient in return for what he did for his client, for the client had become careless, and even indifferent. The result of this was Mosse determined to read him a sharp lesson, and he did it in this way. He held the Count's acceptance for three thousand marks. The acceptance matured, and instead of being retired as usual, it was duly presented, and payment was demanded.

The Count was dumbfounded. The sum of three thousand marks at that moment was utterly beyond him, and so he went down in a towering rage to Mosse's office. He stormed and bounced, but Mosse remained as cool through it all as if he had been blind and stone deaf. But when the Count had exhausted himself, Mosse said calmly—

"If you have done, I'll begin. You've been playing with me, and I do not intend that you shall play with me. You have become neglectful of my interests recently, and that won't do, and since you have broken our contract, I want repayment of my money."

"But I tell you I can't pay now," roared the Count.

"Just so. There is all the more reason then why you should closely adhere to your bargain. You must aid me if I am to aid you. It's not going to be all on one side, I assure you."

The Count saw that he had made a mistake, and that, galling as it was to his vanity, he would have to eat humble pie. And so, promising to amend his ways and do better in the future, he left the office with the old bill cancelled in his pocket, and a new one in Mosse's safe. But the Count made a resolution now. He would use every means to get

out of Mosse's clutches. How he was going to do it he didn't know. He had not even the faintest glimmering of an idea. He was in the habit of trusting a good deal to luck, and luck was to save him in the present instance ; for very shortly afterwards he met by chance the brother of Mademoiselle Bertha Schmidt of Zurich.

The results of that meeting the reader already knows. But it is necessary here to say that the Count von Arenberg did not take that desperate step without many misgivings and haltings. If the Schmidts had been less anxious and less determined to have captured him he would never have been caught. But he was too weak to offer opposition to such determination. He saw wealth before him, and he was being pulled towards it by an iron hand. He was dazzled and blinded by the luxury amidst which the Schmidts lived, no less than by the superb beauty of Bertha herself. No wonder that he forgot Mosse for the time, and even his Jewish wife whom he had abandoned in far-off St. Petersburg. Many men far stronger than this one have been tempted to their fall by infinitely less temptation.

And so the Count took the fatal plunge—took it with the air of a man who was driven to it by that inexorable fury, Desperation. Stupidly, however, he believed he could conceal the marriage from Mosse, but, as he was to prove, he made a woful mistake. With the first money he got from the Schmidts he paid off his indebtedness to Mosse, much to that gentleman's astonishment, and he informed him that he was going away for some time to stay with a relative. Mosse was too shrewd a man to be so easily taken in, and when he learned the Count had left Mayence, where he had been quartered, he set about making inquiries, and it did not take him long to find out where the Count had gone to. Having learned this Mosse chuckled, and in due course he went to Zurich, to see for himself the new kind of life his dear friend had gone in for. And his unexpected and unwelcome appearance at the Chateau was like the

falling of a thunderbolt at the feet of Count von Arenberg. Perhaps nothing could have tended to more conclusively prove the Count's weakness and want of foresight than his supposition that he could escape from Mosse. Had it not been for the St. Petersburg incident he might have done so. And now as he awoke from his dream ; now that the glamour of his new marriage had passed away, and he fully recognized the extent of his guilt, he was aghast. There is this to be said in his favour, he was almost dragged into the marriage by Frau Schmidt ; and it would have wanted an infinitely stronger willed man than he was to resist the blandishments of the designing widow, and the big fortune that was dangled before his eyes. That fortune had lured him into a pitfall, and he had dragged the luckless girl Bertha with him.

When the shock of the fright which Mosse's appearance gave him had passed away, and he was enabled to reflect, the effrontery which had served him so well in the past came to his aid, and he said to himself—

“As long as I see this man well, and tolerate him here for a while, his tongue will keep quiet, and who can tell what may happen in the meanwhile. He may die. He is gross and inordinately stout, and such people frequently go off suddenly. He shall gorge here like a boa constrictor to repletion, and some day apoplexy may relieve me of his presence.”

This was no doubt fallacious reasoning. But how many thousands of men have reasoned in the same way before ; for do not desperate men hope against hope, even as a drowning person will clutch at a passing straw.

In this case the wish of the Count was undoubtedly father to the thought ; but he had miscalculated his man.

Herr Rudolph Mosse in the ordinary course of nature was not unlikely to outlive the Count himself, for he had been endowed with an iron constitution that as yet showed little sign of deterioration, and he had never had a serious illness

in all his life. On the other hand, the Count was delicate, and he had sorely tried his constitution. But is it not true, every man thinks every man is mortal but himself?

In a few days the Count felt less disturbed in his mind, and so far as he could he enjoyed himself, notwithstanding that Mosse, like a shadow of evil, was ever present with him. Had things gone on as smoothly as he anticipated all might have been well. But there came that unfortunate quarrel between him and Mosse, during which he struck the latter. He had allowed his hasty temper to override his discretion, and he saw with shrinking alarm that he had turned his passive enemy into a active one. Nevertheless, he held to the belief that Mosse would not denounce him. "Mosse likes money," he thought, "and now I have the means of getting money I can purchase his silence." He was reckoning here without his host in two ways. Firstly, he knew little of Mosse's real character; and, secondly, he was under the impression that he had only to ask Frau Schmidt for money and he would get it. He was to find himself mistaken on both these points, for though the Frau had paid liberally for the gratification of her vanity, there was a limit to her purse as also to her patience. And in the present instance that limit had been all but reached. The Count, however, was of a sanguine disposition, and he cheered himself with the hope that all would yet be well—that Mosse would hold his tongue, for he had everything to gain by so doing, much to lose by betraying secrets. But Mosse was an unknown quantity as the Count was soon to learn.

CHAPTER XLV.

SIREN-LIKE.

DURING the quarrel that took place between the Count and Mosse at the Chateau, the Count flung the roll of bank-notes, amounting to thirty thousand francs, into the face of his persecutor, who immediately picked them up and put them in his pocket. Now, thirty thousand francs was a considerable sum of money to be extorted at one time, and it ought to have satisfied Mosse under the circumstances. In all probability it would have purchased his silence, with various refreshers as time went on ; but the blow had aroused all the worst passions of his nature. He considered it an unpardonable outrage. This view was, of course, a ridiculous one, having regard to his own dastardly conduct in intruding on the privacy of the Countess, and in insulting her by kissing her. But few men who are punished for misdeeds really think themselves deserving of such punishment. Mosse certainly did not do so. At any rate, knowing what he did of the Count, he was not disposed to submit tamely to a thrashing by a man whom he despised. But, apart from this, he also felt very embittered against Bertha for the way she had treated him. This, of course, only served to show how thoroughly perverted all his moral views were. The wrong which he himself had been the victim of years ago had so radically changed him that absolutely what he considered a dastardly outrage then he was prepared to justify now. It would perhaps be a difficult matter to accurately

analyze the motives which prompted him to the steps he took, but they may be summed up in the one word—Revenge. He felt that he had got all the money he was likely to get, and in a spirit of execrable spite he resolved to ruin the Count entirely, and with that view he would go to St. Petersburg and lay the whole affair before the Count's legal wife, Rebecca Cohen.

This motive, however, was not the only one that prompted him to take the journey. His business in Frankfort was by no means in a flourishing condition, and it struck him that, with the capital he now had at his disposal, he might transfer his business to St. Petersburg with advantage. But before doing so he deemed it advisable to make some inquiries on the spot. So, with the double object in view, he set out for the Russian capital, where in former years he had occupied such an honourable position.

It was somewhat curious that he should have arrived there just at the time that Rebecca was in such deep trouble. She had always been a great favourite with him, and the time had been when he regarded her with as much affection as if he had been her father. His disposition had changed since then. He had become a hardened cynic, and extremely selfish. Had this not been so he would have allowed her to remain in ignorance of the whereabouts and the conduct of her husband. For what good could arise from her knowing.

Her surprise at seeing him was, of course, very great, for she had not seen him for a long time, and had even thought that he must be dead. Cohen himself was also glad to meet him, for they had been firm friends in the past, and Cohen knew nothing of the other's career since his departure from Russia. He was made a welcome guest in the house, and on him Rebecca cast all her hopes. She therefore lost no time in telling him what had happened, and in asking him if he could suggest any means whereby she could get out of the clutches of Kalnoky.

Mosse listened to the story with deep interest, but shook his head gravely when it was finished.

"You are in this man's power," he said, "and I don't exactly see how you can defy him. He is a Government agent and can ruin you."

These were heavy words to the unfortunate girl. They annihilated her hopes; and plunged her into despair again.

"Can nothing be done to save us from this man?" she exclaimed, wringing her hands and looking at him as though she had some sort of idea that he was a Daniel come to judgment, and could, if he liked, give judgment in her favour.

"The only thing I see is flight," he remarked, thoughtfully.

"But how are we to do that? In the first place, Kalnoky would not let us leave the country," exclaimed Rebecca, in distress.

Mosse scratched his head, as he always did when he was a little puzzled.

"No. I do not suppose he would if he could prevent it," he said. "But ways and means may be found to render him impotent to interfere."

Rebecca caught at these words, for they were uttered deliberately, and with a hidden meaning.

"What do you propose?" she asked, quickly.

"I cannot answer the question offhand," he replied. "I must talk with your father first. But now let us change the subject. Tell me, have you ever heard anything of your husband since he left you?"

She looked at him inquiringly, and in some amazement, for it was so obvious from his tone and manner that he had a definite object in asking the question.

"No, not a word. Why?"

"Well, I have."

"You have?"

"Yes. Do you still hanker after him?"

An expression of scorn came into her face as she said, with a sneer—

"Hanker after him, indeed! Not I. The unmitigated scoundrel. I should be wanting in common decency to hanker after a man who has so grossly and shamefully deceived me."

"That is exactly my opinion. But you are not yet aware to what extent he has deceived you. Supposing now that you had the chance of punishing him, would you do it?"

"Would I do it?" she cried, fiercely, while her face reddened with passion. "I would hunt him to his death if it were in my power to do so. He has blighted my life and broken my heart. Why should I spare him?"


"Why, indeed! Well, I can place it in your power to hunt him to his ruin," said Mosse, "if that would do as well, for he has married another woman, an heiress, and he is living in luxury and rolling in wealth."

Rebecca held her breath, and the colour faded from her face. She clenched her hands and bit her lips, and her whole manner indicated that passion and jealousy were almost choking her. It almost appeared as if in those few moments she had undergone some strange metamorphosis; and from a gentle and exceedingly beautiful woman she had changed into a Fury. So overpowering was the feeling that swayed her that she rose from her seat and paced the room in agitation, until presently, with a great sigh, as she threw her hands above her head, she exclaimed—

"Oh, my God, if this is true, I will kill him."

"Come now, calm yourself," Mosse remarked. "There is nothing to be gained by getting excited, you know. Sit down and listen patiently, for I have a long story to tell."

It was some minutes before she could calm herself sufficiently to resume her seat and listen. Then he told her circumstantially all the particulars relating to the Count. And when she learned that the Count had married her in a false name, his villainy seemed to her to be accentuated and



blackier than ever. She remembered now in this hour of her trial how she used to talk to Joseph Courrette about the time when possibly he should be her avenger for the wrong and outrage that had been done to her. But Courrette was in Siberia, and she was practically alone, though it was not in her nature to bear such a wrong patiently. Some women might have done so, but she didn't belong to that class. Her wounded pride maddened her, and a sense of the shame and humiliation she had suffered through the heartlessness and villainy of her husband, begot in her a fierce craving to retaliate, to crush him as he had crushed her.

"I'll pull him down from his high position," she said, between her clenched teeth, and with a bitter cynical smile about her mouth. "I'll make him eat dirt by the shovelful."

"Yes, you can do that, and I want you to do it," said Mosse, "for he deserves it. But now listen. You can kill two birds with one stone. It's very evident that it is no longer safe for you and your father to remain here. Let him quietly and speedily make preparations for leaving this country. He may have to submit to sacrifices. But you had better both of you suffer some loss than end your days in Siberia."

"Yes, I agree with you. But I must consult with my father first," said Rebecca. "I am willing to leave at once."

The result of this conversation was, Solomon Cohen was made acquainted with the story of Count von Arenberg's treachery. He heard it with shame, but he did not display the passion his daughter had done. He was bowed down with sorrow as he thought of the wrong inflicted upon the child he loved so much.

"My poor Rebecca," he murmured, "you were deserving of a better fate. But what are we to do?"

"Do!" she cried. "We will do as Mosse suggests. We

will leave the country. We will go and live in Zurich ; and we will hurl this precious Count—*my husband*”—she said this with a sneer of contempt—“from his proud position, and punish him as he deserves.”

“But you forget,” said her father, in a troubled tone, “that we are in the power of Kalnoky. Your thoughtlessness, my child, has brought me trouble on all sides.”

This was not meant as a reproach, but his daughter took it in that light, and it made her feel even more bitter ; but she was bitter against herself, not against him, for she knew that he had spoken truly, however unpleasant it was for her to have to admit it.

“You are right,” she said. “But something must be done.”

“I think Kalnoky may be rendered powerless to do any harm,” put in Mosse. “We must appeal to the Nihilists to help us. You have helped them long enough, and they will surely render you service in return now.”

“How ? ” asked Cohen, quickly.

“Can he not be bought ? ” queried Mosse.

“No,” exclaimed Rebecca. “I have offered him money, and he scorns it.”

“A man who is above price is difficult to deal with,” Mosse remarked. “Kalnoky is dangerous, that is evident from all you have told me. By being dangerous to you, he is dangerous to the cause for which the Nihilists are struggling. Therefore it is for your friends to come to your assistance. You must know plenty of men who will undertake to deprive Kalnoky of the power to do you any harm. It is for you to find out how it is to be done.”

Cohen himself did not quite enter into the spirit of this suggestion, for the fact was he had lost heart a good deal. Age was telling upon him, and he was not as hopeful as he was. Nevertheless, they sat up, the three of them, until far into the night discussing their position. And at last it was decided that Rebecca should undertake to keep Kalnoky

quiet for a few days until some scheme was devised by which they could successfully get out of the country ; and in the meantime Mosse was to go and see a man who was a leader amongst the Nihilists, and who would probably be able to devise some plan.

The next day the opportunity that Rebecca wanted occurred, for Kalnoky put himself in her way as she was going out.

"Look here, who is this Herr Mosse you have got in the house?" he demanded, sullenly.

Rebecca saw by his manner that he was in a bad temper, and she even thought that he was jealous. She knew, too, that she had a part to play—that, in fact, her own and her father's safety were so gravely threatened that she must lure this man to his fall. She smiled sweetly when he had spoken, and said—

"Surely you're not jealous."

"I am jealous of any one who takes much notice of you," he answered, sullenly.

"What an extraordinary thing," she exclaimed, laughingly. "Upon my word, badly as you have treated me, I shall begin to think soon that you really entertain some sincere respect for me."

He looked at her with a look of surprise. Her changed manner attracted his attention.

"You know perfectly well," he said, "that I have a sincere regard for you. But don't play with me. Don't make a fool of me any longer. I am tired and sick of it."

"I am neither doing the one nor the other," she returned. "And if you would be less hasty and less snappish we should get on better. Herr Mosse is a very old friend of my father's, and has known me since I was a child. He formerly resided here, and has some idea of setting up in business. But I have something to tell you that may interest you more than this, possibly, if you *are* sincere in your admiration of me."

"What is it?" he asked quickly, and as though he was by no means assured by her manner and tone, but still thought that she was making a fool of him.

She changed her seeming levity, and assumed a serious air as she answered with designed ambiguity—

"Herr Mosse has placed me in possession of certain facts, which to a considerable extent allow me more freedom of action in regard to my plans for the future."

Kalnoky's eyes opened wide as he regarded her for a moment or two in silence before saying—

"There is a riddle in your words, and the answer does not seem to me to be clear."

"Surely then you are obtuse," she answered.

"Perhaps I am. But you do not give me much clue to your meaning. What are the facts you have learnt from Herr Mosse? and in what way are you likely to have more freedom of action?"

"I told you some days ago that I was married, did I not?"

"You did."

Then suddenly he exclaimed, as light seemed to dawn upon him—

"Is your husband dead?"

She smiled as she answered—

"Well, no. He is not exactly dead. But there is some reason—a good reason—for supposing that his marriage with me was not a legal one."

"I see," Kalnoky exclaimed under his breath, and displaying what was for him considerable excitement.

Then he altered his manner, and scrutinizing her suspiciously, said—

"But are you speaking the truth? You are not playing with me?"

She drew herself up indignantly, and answered—

"You needn't insult me by doubting me. What I have stated is correct."

He seemed somewhat puzzled how to act, but asked her quickly—

"Are you going to take any steps to test the legality of the marriage?"

"Yes."

"And should it not have been legal, what then?"

"I shall be free," she answered, slightly averting her face.

"Am I to derive hope from these words, in spite of all the harsh things we have said to each other?" he demanded.

"It depends upon yourself. You have said some very harsh things to me, but I am prepared to forgive you. One thing is certain, however, that you will have to treat me very differently to what you have done if you wish to win my regard. A man can hardly hope to win a woman by bullying her, and you must confess that you have bullied me."

"I have never bullied you, Rebecca," he answered, a little sternly; "but you have given me good cause for anger. Show more consideration for my feelings, and I will give you devotion."

She held forth her hand to him, and he took it, though he was evidently surprised, and could not make up his mind as to whether she was in earnest or not.

"Well now, there's my hand," she said, with a show of tenderness. "Let bygones be bygones. Have a little patience, and show that you are sincerely desirous of being my friend instead of my enemy. A woman is to be won by kindness not harshness."

Before she could resist him he had thrown his arms round her neck and was kissing her with hot, passionate kisses. Inwardly she shrank as if she was being stung, but she endured his caresses, for she was playing a part, and she knew she must play it well or she would be lost. They lingered together for some time, and the fascination she was enabled to exert over him completely held him in thrall.

But a little later, when he had taken his departure, she muttered with a sneer of withering contempt on her beautiful face—"I will lure you to your destruction, my good man, as surely as Samson was lured to his. You have had your day, now I will have mine."

CHAPTER XLVI.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

THE plot thickens! This expression aptly describes the progress made in the Cohen household during the ensuing weeks following on Mosse's arrival. Cohen, who had been a little hard to convince at first of the absolute necessity that he should leave Russia, in order to assure the safety of himself and daughter, soon came to see that he was living in a Fool's Paradise, and that beneath his feet seethed a volcano that might at any moment explode. For years he had been enabled to avoid attracting suspicion. But Courrette's arrest and the incidents in connection with Kalnoky no longer left him room for doubt that his position was unsafe. Of course his removal necessitated time and caution, and he proceeded to instal in his business as manager a nephew, who on and off had been associated with him for some time. And in addition to this he gave this nephew a power of attorney to sell and dispose of the business in the course of a year. All this was kept strictly secret. But quite apart from the value of his business, Solomon had large sums of money invested in other countries, for he had always been shrewd enough to see that a day might possibly come when he would have to quit Russia hurriedly, and so he had taken precautions accordingly. If he could not be spoken of as wealthy, he certainly was rich, and, therefore, even if he lost the value of his business altogether, it would not affect him very

materially financially, however much he might take it to heart.

During the time that these preparations were being secretly carried out, Rebecca was admirably playing her part, objectionable, and even repulsive, as it was to her. And so well did she play it that she succeeded in thoroughly disarming Kalnoky's suspicions. At any rate, if he had any suspicions, he most certainly did not show them. In fact, he believed that he had won a great victory over Rebecca ; at the same time he gave outward signs, undemonstrative as he was, that he bore for her an ardent admiration, and she being a woman, saw this and used it to her own advantage. For in all ages, and in all countries, women have possessed a subtle power over men, but few of them, comparatively speaking, know how to use it. To do so successfully is an art, and when this power is not properly applied, it as frequently as not destroys the possessor, for it may become as dangerous to her who possesses it as to him over whom she exerts it. But Rebecca rose to the occasion. Desperate diseases require desperate remedies, and she, recognizing this, did not shrink from a desperate course.

Nearly four months had thus passed away, and summer was well advanced. Mosse was still the guest of Cohen, and had shown no disposition to leave. He found the quarters most comfortable, and Mosse was a sybarite. He loved comfort and ease. But he had taken his share in the conspiracy which was fast ripening to its climax. The settling up of his affairs occupied Cohen much longer than he had at first anticipated. Mosse had long ago made arrangements for the final *coup*, and he only waited for the signal from Cohen to put it into execution. He had quite abandoned the idea of resettling in St. Petersburg : in fact, it would be almost impossible to do so with safety after his friend's flight. Moreover, his business in Frankfort, which he had left in charge of his factotum, was looking up a little, so that he had no inducement to remain away.

At length one day Solomon announced that his affairs were arranged and his preparations completed, and that he was ready to leave at any moment. A night was therefore fixed for their departure, and that night was to coincide with the carrying out of the plot that had long been maturing.

On this particular evening Rebecca expressed a desire to Kalnoky to visit the opera. There was nothing unusual in this, and they had been to the theatre frequently of late. All unconscious of the fate in store for him, he readily consented to accompany her.

It was late when they left the theatre, and she suggested that they should walk home. The night was sultry. The stars looked dreamy and hazy in the heated atmosphere. The cafés were full of roysterers, and the main thoroughfares were astir with luxurious carriages as people wended their way homewards either from theatres or from paying visits.

Kalnoky proposed taking a carriage, but Rebecca objected. She said she preferred walking, and as the night was so fine and so sultry, she expressed a desire to stroll leisurely by a somewhat roundabout way which would take them along the quais. It was by no means the pleasantest part of the town, but he offered no objection. He was under the spell of her beauty, and was fascinated. She was a modern Circe luring him to his doom ; but he was all unconscious of it. He believed that he had completely won her affection ; and he congratulated himself on his cleverness in obtaining that paper from her, for to that he attributed his success.

It was a somewhat singular coincidence that on this very night of all nights he should have displayed his feelings as he did. He was by no means a man of sentiment ; and his language when in her company was seldom coloured with that florid colouring which seems to some people indispensable when love-making. But now he was unusually tender to her. Her siren spells had rendered him completely powerless. Her gloved hand was laid on his arm, and he caressed it with an infinite gentleness.

They had been talking about the singers they had heard at the opera, and had been discussing the music, when there came a pause in their conversation, and suddenly he exclaimed in a tone of deep admiration—

“I wonder why Nature made you so beautiful?”

“To subdue you,” she answered, with a forced laugh and ready wit.

“Then she has thoroughly succeeded in her purpose,” he returned, with evident self-satisfaction. “I am subdued, and in a manner that at one time I deemed impossible. I used to think that the woman wasn’t born who could take me captive. When I was young, unlike most youths I shunned female society. I had a singular and deep-rooted aversion to it. Nor did this aversion pass away as my years increased. On the contrary, it rather strengthened. I had an unaccountable feeling that all women were the personification of deceit and spite. That no woman could love one man with an absolute love that would enable her to sacrifice everybody and everything for his sake. The Paul and Virginia class of stories were, to my mind, utterly absurd, and the outcome of distorted imagination and unwholesome sentiment.”

“And have you changed your opinions now?” she asked, betraying some nervous excitement, which he did not notice, or if he did, he ascribed it to a cause that was far from the right one.

“Yes,” he answered decisively, “I have. I was a cynic once, but I am no longer so. At any rate not as regards women.”

“And what has brought about this remarkable conversion?” she asked, for the sake of keeping his attention and thoughts fixed upon her. But she took not the slightest interest in what he was saying. She was uneasy and nervous almost to feverishness. Her eyes were searching the long quai for something or somebody she expected. She was suffering suspense that was painful; that suspense that one feels when he knows that a crisis is approaching.

"You have brought it about," he said, with some indication of emotion in his voice.

"I?" she answered mechanically, and still searching the quai with her eyes.

"Yes; you have redeemed in my sight all your sex. There are women bad enough, heaven knows, but somehow I can think better of womankind now than I did a little while ago."

"You honour me, and pay a compliment to my sex," she remarked, with irony that was not entirely concealed, for he said quickly—

"Don't make light of what I say. I may be wanting in taste, judgment, refinement. I may even be weak and a fool; but at any rate you have inspired me with a passion for you which might beget me your respect, or I will even say pity."

"Ah, you are talking satirically now," she remarked, growing more and more uneasy, and feeling more and more uncomfortable, as he was trying in his peculiar way to express his love. As a matter of fact she could not suppress a little feeling of pity, for she was neither without sympathy, nor was she in any way hardened, though she had tried to believe that she was so. And believing, as she was bound to believe, that this man was inspired with a genuine passion for her, she grieved that she was compelled in self-defence to so thoroughly deceive him. A network of strange circumstances had entangled her, and to free herself she must resort to any means; and Kalnoky himself more than any one else had made those means a necessity. He had, in fact, brought his doom upon himself.

They walked on for some little distance in silence. The river made mournful music as it lapped the piers, and the long rows of lamplights, as they narrowed in the far-off vista, seemed, somehow, suggestive of her future. She could see but a little way ahead into that future; beyond was darkness and uncertainty. They came at last to the

corner of a street that branched off from the quai, and at this street corner a closed fiacre was standing, the horse's head towards the street. The driver of the vehicle was on his box, but seemed to be sound asleep. The houses in this quarter were very old and very lofty, and threw great shadows far into the river. They were for the most part let out as grain and other stores, and at night were locked up and left to silence and the rats. Not a living soul was in sight save the driver on his box. Only the gurgle of the river broke the silence.

Rebecca stopped here, and said to her companion—

"What a funny place for a fiacre to be waiting at this hour of the night. The horse and the driver both seem to be asleep. Who can have been visiting here I wonder?"

"I don't know; perhaps the man is drunk. I had better wake the poor wretch up," he answered. "He will be getting fined."

Almost before the words had left his lips three men had sprung upon Kalnoky from one of the deeply-recessed doorways peculiar to the buildings. Before he could offer any resistance, before he could utter a cry, a heavy shawl was thrown over his head, and a rope was twisted tightly round his chest and arms.

The driver of the fiacre was fully awake now. One of the men opened the door, and Kalnoky was thrust in, and was quickly followed by the other three. The door was closed; the driver lashed his horse, and the vehicle rumbled away at an ordinary pace so as not to attract attention.

So nimbly and quickly had this little drama been performed that it occupied less than a minute. Not a word was spoken. All one heard was the deep, laboured breath of the struggling men.

Rebecca had drawn back into the shadow as the men sprang out, and when the vehicle had gone off a fourth man appeared from somewhere. This man was Mosse. She was excited and nervous, and trembling. He drew her arm through his, and said—

"Come, let us get away as quickly as possible. That was cleverly managed."

She could make no answer, but hurried with him along the quai, and it was marvellous how agile he was now that agility was required.

In the meantime the fiacre made its way through the town, where midnight life was at its full height, and the café revellers were abandoning themselves to the hour. If any one noticed the closed fiacre rolling along no one certainly dreamed that inside of it was a man who was being abducted. A party of half-intoxicated people—two men and two women—hailed it as it passed the corner of a street, but the driver shook his head drowsily and said he and his horse were worn out, and were going home to rest.

The occupants made no sound and uttered no word. So securely bound and muffled was Kalnoky that he could not move, and when first thrust in one of his abductors said—

"If you make the slightest attempt to attract attention or escape you will be stabbed to death. Your life depends on your silence."

If he had been ever so inclined he could hardly have made any such attempt, so tightly was the rope twisted about him, besides which he was in the custody of three powerful men, against whose united strength his would have been useless. But he knew only too well that he had no chance. He had been kidnapped, but what his fate was to be he dare not even think.

The vehicle continued its journey for nearly two hours. To the victim it was an awful period of agony of mind and torturing suspense. He was nearly suffocated by the shawl round his face, and the rope almost stopped the circulation in his arms. The direction in which he was being carried he had not the slightest idea of, and he could only guess that his captors were Nihilists.

At length the fiacre stopped, and he was helped out, and led into some place, and up many stairs into a room. The

shawl and rope were removed, and he was so dazed and stupified that he reeled and fell on to a heap of straw on the floor. A man, with his face covered with a black veil to prevent recognition, stood over him and said—

"You will be kept a prisoner here for a week or ten days, and then set at liberty, but any attempt to escape will ensure your death. It is not intended that any harm should befall you, but it is necessary that you should be detained. So have patience, and make no attempt to regain your liberty."

Kalnoky scarcely heard the words. He was semi-unconscious, and groaning, sank with his face on the straw. Without speaking another word, the man left him, taking the lamp that stood on the table with him. Then all was silence and darkness.

The prisoner must have slept, for when he came to himself daylight was streaming in through a small window. It took him some time to collect his scattered senses, but when he realized how he had been trapped, he became almost like a wild beast with fury, for he at once came to the conclusion that Rebecca was responsible for this. He sprang to his feet. His limbs were sore with the pressure of the rope, and his whole body ached.

The room was narrow and long, with a slanting roof, and was therefore evidently a garret. There was one door, and a small window in a recess, but the window was protected by two iron bars placed horizontally. He tried the door. Not that he thought for a moment that it would be unlocked. He kicked on the wall, but it gave back a solid, dense sound, showing its thickness. He tore his hair, and paced backwards and forwards like a wild animal that is newly caged, and the more clearly that he realized the plot the more fierce did he become, and he cursed himself for being such a fool as to be so easily led into the snare. Against Rebecca he muttered dreadful imprecations, and ground his teeth and stamped his foot with impotent rage,

until the excess of his passion and the intensity of his feelings produced such a state of nervous excitement that he felt as if he were going raving mad.

It was such an awful blow to his self-conceit ; such a thorough and crushing defeat in the very moment of his fancied triumph.

He saw all the plot as if it had been told to him. He was to be kept a prisoner until Rebecca and her father escaped from the country.

"Oh, if he could only defeat them ; only triumph after all."

He gnashed and ground his teeth like a mad wolf, and beat his head upon the straw. He must have become unconscious again, for when next he gazed round he saw that food and wine had been placed on the table.

He sat up and composed himself as well as he could.

"They evidently don't intend to kill me," he thought, "and that is something."

This thought gave him new hope and new courage, and he rose and partook of the food and wine ; and then for hours afterwards he paced up and down meditating revenge.

"She may go to the farthest ends of the earth, but she shall not escape me. I will follow her and kill her, so help me, Heaven."

This was the idea he nursed, and it kept him from becoming a lunatic. No sound came to him. The place might have been a tomb, so silent was it. The barred window which was in the roof afforded but a narrow strip of view, but that view was over open country, and he knew he was far from the town.

The dreary, monotonous hours passed, and as evening came the door was suddenly opened, and a man appeared with more food in a basket. He was armed with a naked dagger, which he grasped in his right hand, and a black veil was over his face. He placed the basket on the table, and went out again without uttering a sound. Nor did the

prisoner speak, but when he was alone he examined the contents of the basket and murmured—

“I must eat to live, and must live to be revenged.”

He passed a terrible night. Restless and feverish, sleeping by snatches and waking up with a start, the morning found him bleary-eyed and haggard, and filled with a desperate resolve. He climbed up to the window by placing the table under it. One of the panes was broken, and the sashes were old and worm-eaten, and fastened with bolts that were deeply encrusted with rust. He managed with some difficulty to open the window. It opened inward. Between the two bars he could just thrust his head. Looking round, he observed nothing but open country. What was below he could not tell, as the lower part of the roof obstructed the line of sight. He tried the bars, but they were firmly set into the stonework.

He descended again with a despairing groan. But he thought this—

“If I could remove those cursed bars and get on to the roof, I might find a way down to the ground.”

But how were the bars to be removed?

That was a problem he set himself to dream over.

Presently the veiled and armed man appeared again with a fresh supply of food, which he placed on the table without speaking a word, as on the previous occasion.

Kalnoky partook of the food and drank the wine, and then gave himself up again to the problem of escape. Could he find the solution of the problem? It seemed to him hopeless, and yet somehow he could not, and would not, abandon hope. Perhaps if he had done so he really would have gone raving mad.

CHAPTER XLVII.

HOW KALNOKY ESCAPED.

KALNOKY's excitement did not arise from any fear that he had for his life, as he believed that to be safe. He knew too much of the Nihilists to think they would have taken all this trouble if their intention had been to kill him. They could have assassinated him without carrying him off. The fact of his being informed that he would be detained for a week or ten days told its own story. It was a revelation. It revealed to him that he was the victim of a cunningly devised plot, which had for its object the escape of Rebecca and her father ; she had betrayed him into the hands of his enemies, as Delilah of old betrayed Samson. And against her his feelings rose to such a pitch of exasperation, that he was almost beside himself. He had talked love to her the night before, and no doubt he talked then as he felt. But now love had changed to hate, and he would have given every rouble he possessed in the world to be able to foil her in her moment of supposed triumph.

He was perfectly well aware of the utter uselessness of any attempt to influence his captors by pleading to them. And it would be equally useless for him to try and overcome the man who brought him his food. For was it not evident that the jailor anticipated such a contingency by coming into the room with a naked dagger in his hand. But even supposing that, by any possible chance, he could overcome the man, it would be attributing an idiotic want of caution

to his captors to suppose that this man was alone in the house. The extraordinary precautions they had taken to secure the success of their plan were hardly likely to be stultified by an oversight at last. That was not the way the Nihilists worked. Their plans were always made with perfect skill, and every detail was invariably thought out with the utmost foresight and care.

The prisoner weighed all these points in his mind, and there was but one conclusion he could come to, that was that he must absolutely depend upon his own ingenuity.

He lay on his straw and stared with haggard eyes on those two bars. Why had they been placed there? Surely not to keep the robbers from coming in, for robbers do not usually enter by a garret window. Therefore they were there to keep somebody from going out. In other words, the place had been used as a place of confinement before, and the fact of their being there seemed to suggest that from the roof there might be a means of escape. The Nihilists could put two bars in a garret window without attracting any attention. But to alter the roof in any way would be too conspicuous.

Reasoning thus, the wretched man was led to regard that window as his sole way out of the toils, and to the revenge that his blood was all afire for.

He rose and went once more to the window. He shook the bars as a savage and caged baboon might have shaken the bars of his prison in his panting desire to be once more free in his native jungles.

It was twilight. The sky was purple, and the throbbing stars were already visible. But all was silent, silent as the grave; proving conclusively that the house was in a lonely situation, and far removed from the roar of the town.

He turned away with a groan of maddening despair, and throwing himself upon the straw, face downwards, he felt as if his very heart was bursting. For his self-conceit was wounded to its very core. He was humbled as he had

never before been humbled ; and when he remembered how he had fallen under Rebecca's spell, and had allowed himself to be blinded and fascinated by her, he was tempted to batter his head against the wall.

What accentuated his mental sufferings more than anything else was that he of all men should have been so easily gulled. But this idea arose from his tremendous self-conceit ; for cleverer men than he, and men of infinitely keener penetration than he possessed, had been outwitted by women. But he had an idea that he had always been so watchful, so shrewd, so capable of divining motives and reading character. He considered that he had done a wonderfully clever thing when he exacted that compromising confession from Rebecca ; and yet she had turned the tables upon him, and he was caught like a rat in a trap, which is lured to its destruction by a morsel of roasted cheese. The rat is a cunning and sharp animal, and yet the roasted cheese proves too much for it. So in Kalnoky's case, his passion for Rebecca Cohen—for after all it was only passion—had led him to his doom.

The gloom deepened. The stars became more brilliant, and the rising moon threw a sheen over the landscape, and even lighted the wretched garret.


Once more Kalnoky got up and went to the window. He was desperate. He wrenched at the bars with all the concentrated strength his muscles were capable of. But all to no purpose. He only strained his arms and hurt his hands.

With a smothered cry of rage he fell on the straw and cursed his fate. Suddenly an inspiration seemed to seize him. He sprang up and tapped the sloping ceiling. There was no solidity there. It was in fact merely a partition of laths and plaster between him and the tiled roof. A new hope filled him. His eyes blazed at the very idea of having found a solution to the problem. He drew out his knife, and began to dig a little hole into the ceiling until he had laid bare a few inches of laths. He got excited, and worked

harder, and dragged the straw underneath so as to deaden the sound of the falling pieces of plaster. In a little while he had cleared out a strip of plaster from the interstices of the laths, and, looking through the hole, he almost uttered a cry of joy, for above were the tiles, and he could absolutely see the moonlight through chinks where the overlapping tiles did not meet perfectly.

He redoubled his energies until the perspiration streamed off him. And at last he had laid bare the whole length of a lath, and getting his fingers behind it he tore it down. It made some noise and he was startled. He paused and listened. He crept to the door, applied his ear and listened, but heard nothing. All was still. He went back to his work, and got out more of the laths, until he had made a hole large enough to admit his body. He placed the table underneath; then climbed up to the joists and sat there breathless, heated, and exhausted. After five minutes' rest he got on his knees and began to cautiously remove some of the tiles. This was an easy process when once he had got one out, for each tile was simply held in its place by a narrow strip of bent zinc. It did not take long to clear a space through which he could pass, and getting through, he was in the open air and on the roof. He scrambled up cautiously to the ridge, and sat there straddled-legged, mopping the wet from his face.

So far all was well; but he was a long way from being free yet. He heard a distant clock strike nine. He swept the whole landscape with his eyes. The house was detached, and stood in its own grounds, but there were other houses scattered about. In the south, six or seven miles away, was a widespread lurid glare in the sky from the lights of St. Petersburg. To the north, the east, and west, the horizon was dark, and the country between was dotted with villages, interspersed with dark forests, and here and there, where the moonlight fell upon it, gleamed the river, like patches of frosted silver.



Kalnoky drew a great breath. Sitting there astride the ridge of the roof, with the wanton air of heaven playing about his heated forehead, made him feel almost as if he was actually free. But between him and freedom were nearly sixty feet. He must descend to the ground, but how? Here was even a more difficult problem to be solved. Could he find the solution? But time pressed. Should his captors enter the room they would see by the hole in the ceiling how he had escaped, and his recapture would be certain. Therefore he must not waste a moment. Once on *terra firma* again, and then woebetide, not only all who had anything to do with that house, but the deceptive Rebecca and her father—on them should fall the crushing weight of his vengeance. He would show them no mercy, not an atom, and when they were starting for Siberia he would be near to shriek his triumph in their ears. This was his thought, and it made him grind his teeth with fierce rage, and his pulses quickened their beats with excitement. Presently he commenced to move, by aid of his hands, along the ridge, until he had gained the gable end of the house where there was a chimney stack. Here he stood up and was able to peer over. But the wall of the house went down plumb, and descent that way was absolutely impossible. By clinging with his hands to the edge of the overlapping roof at the gable he slipped down cautiously to the zinc gutter that caught the drainage. His position was perilous, for the slightest slip would precipitate him to the ground, nearly sixty feet below. A feeling of terror did seize him, and still clinging to the edge, and with his feet planted in the gutter, he remained motionless for some little time.

Half-past nine chimed out, and recalled him to his senses. The gutter was apparently firm, for keeping it in its place was a wooden combing, carved in fretwork for ornament. He began to feel more confidence, and gradually straightened himself from his cramped position. He loosened a tile, so as

to get his hand between, and thus secure a better hold. This done he was enabled to gaze over, and some short distance below he saw a small balcony attached to one of the rooms. From this balcony an iron pipe led down to the ground. That pipe seemed to afford him a way of escape if he could only reach the balcony.

He leaned over as far as was compatible with safety. But he heard no sound, and as far as he could make out there was no light in the room, so that it was probably unoccupied. Where he had removed the tile was a narrow wooden beam. He whipped off his coat and waistcoat and shirt, and twisted this latter garment up ; then added to its length by tying his cravat and handkerchief to it. Making one end fast round the beam, he used the other as a rope, and very cautiously and gradually got over the gutter on his stomach, until looking down he was enabled to see that he was only some eight feet off the balcony. He steadied himself for a few moments, then dropped ; but in doing so he did not alight firmly on his feet. The consequence was he reeled against the wooden railing of the balcony, which, being old and rotten, gave way under his weight and fell outward. But it was not all that fell, for Kalnoky could not recover his balance, and with a cry of mortal fear he, too, followed the woodwork. In his descent he turned two or three somersaults and crashed on to a gravelled path, where broken and bleeding he lay an inert mass, with the white light of the moon adding additional pallor to his ghastly, horror-stricken face.

Where would be his vengeance now ? He had played a deep and cunning game, but he had lost, and Death took the stakes.

The noise of the fall caused two men to come running out of the house. They took in the situation at a glance. They picked up the crushed man and carried him in. He was still breathing, and groaned heavily. They laid him on a table, and to their credit they did all they could for him.



“The wooden railing of the balcony, being old and rotten,
gave way under his weight.”

STORMLIGHT.]

[Page 398.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and dates.

But it was too late. The Temple of Life was too much shattered, and in the course of an hour Alexander Kalnoky's lips were sealed with the seal of eternal silence. The revenge he had promised himself would never be taken, for Nemesis had stricken him first.

Later, as the clocks were telling the hour of four, the mangled remains were thrust into a coarse sack, weighted with heavy pieces of rock. The sack with its contents was then placed upon a wheelbarrow, and the two men took it in turns to trundle it over the fields towards the river, and when they reached it they lifted the sack between them, swung it two or three times, and then hurled it into the water. It fell with a great splash, and sank down at once into the ooze at the bottom, which was to be Kalnoky's grave, unknown to any one save those two men, and the river rolled on to the sea, glittering and gurgling, but it told none of the secrets which it had gathered in its tawny breast through countless centuries, and during hundreds of generations of men.

Men came and went ; played out their pitiable little dramas of life, then descended into the dust and were known no more. But the river came and went on for ever. And the secret of Kalnoky's mysterious disappearance it would keep, as it kept all its other secrets, until the Great Day when the sea shall give up its dead, and the story of all hearts be known.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE FRAU MAKES HER EXIT.

THE reader will long ago have discovered that Count von Arenberg was not only a very vain but a very weak man. Of course he would not have admitted himself weak, but his acts and deeds proved that he was so; and he soon began to revel in a fool's paradise as week after week went by, and he saw no more of Rudolph Mosse.

"The idiot," he thought to himself, "he expected to appal me with his menaces, but he has proved himself powerless, and I regret now that I was so stupid as to give him such a large sum of money. However, if it only leads him into dissipation that will kill him, I shall not begrudge it."

With this charitable reflection he dismissed, or at any rate tried to dismiss, Mosse from his mind. But he could not dismiss from his mind this fact, that a shadow had thrown itself over his domestic life, and that he could not raise himself out of it. Between him and the Countess a breach had been made, and there seemed no probability that it would be mended. Even the Frau's faith had been a little shaken, although, perhaps, it was but very little. She tried, however, to conceal this from her daughter, and as she could not shut her eyes to facts she urged Bertha to dismiss the unpleasant incident from her mind and restore the Count to the former position in her favour. But though Bertha listened without a protest to this advice, she did not heed. She did not love her husband. She had never

loved him, she knew that only too surely now ; and since he had allowed her to peep beneath the mask he wore, she felt that it was absolutely impossible that she could ever again regard him with anything like warm affection.

Under these circumstances life at the Chateau did not flow on with the serenity that the outside world believed. The Countess did not find pleasure in her husband's society, and much of her time was passed at her mother's residence. At first the Count seemed to yield with uncomplaining submissiveness to this treatment, though he chafed in silence, hoping that in a little while his wife's feelings would change, and he would secure her affection and obedience again. But she had been too deeply wounded—too greatly disgusted—and time only served to still further widen the breach. She treated him with studied politeness, with freezing coldness, and she made no attempt to conceal the fact that she derived no pleasure from his society. This truth dawned upon him at last in all its fulness, and he attempted to assert his authority in a domineering manner. Very speedily indeed, however, he discovered this was a fatal error, and only meant a still more complete wrecking of his domestic peace ; for Bertha had found out her power and independence, and she asserted her will with an inflexibility that astonished him. So he went upon another tack and affected indifference, and finding that this produced no effect he changed his tactics again, and began to assert his authority.

"Look here, Bertha," he said one day, when he was unusually annoyed, "I've stood this sort of nonsense long enough, and there must be an end to it."

"May I ask what you call nonsense ?" she asked coolly.

"Yes. The way you treat me, and your constant absence at your mother's."

"If my going to my mother's house, Count, is nonsense, I am afraid it will have to continue," she answered.

"I fail to see why you should prefer your mother's society to mine," he exclaimed.

"Perhaps you do, Count," she answered ironically: "but there are also many other things you fail to see."

"Well, I tell you what it is, Bertha. I am your husband, and I intend to exercise a little more control over you. In the future I shall expect you to remain more at home, and entertain my guests."

She smiled sarcastically as she answered—

"It is far from my wish that there should be any unpleasantness between us. But I must beg of you not to speak of controlling me. I decline to be controlled. It is true you are my husband, and I shall not forget that I owe you a certain amount of duty; but I claim to be free to go to my mother's house when and as often as I please."

This answer irritated him beyond measure, and he exclaimed angrily—

"Oh, very well, since you prefer your mother's society to mine, go by all means; but I shall act as I like, you may depend upon it, and without any reference to your feelings."

"That is a matter entirely for your own consideration, Count," she returned frigidly.

As he was afraid to venture on any further discussion he left her, and half an hour later she was driving to Beau Séjour, but she made no mention to her mother of this new outbreak between herself and her husband. The Frau was not blind of course to the change that had come over Bertha; nor could she be unmindful of the fact that her son-in-law was not exactly the ideal man she considered him to be at one time. She was gradually realizing that she had been singularly indiscreet in hurrying Bertha into such a hasty marriage. Nor had the title in the family brought her the greatness she had dreamed of. But she kept these thoughts to herself, for she was not the woman to confess her error. Moreover, she was hopeful that Bertha would in time become more reconciled to her husband, and the unpleasant incident that had caused the breach would soon be forgotten. She therefore treated the Count with great consideration, and

never referred in any way to what had occurred. Knowing how important it was that he should have an ally in his mother-in-law, the Count lost no opportunity to propitiate her, and in the course of time he succeeded in reinstating himself in her good opinion, though his wife remained as obdurate as ever. The cause for this was very easy of definition. She had never loved him, she had been dazzled and fascinated, and when the little romance in connection with the marriage had worn off, and the incident in connection with Rudolph Mosse occurred, she ceased even to look up to him with respect, and sad as it was she regarded him with a certain amount of disgust, which she could not get over. Thus things went on for some time, until at last a terrible and totally unlooked for blow fell upon the family. The Frau, who was a stout and florid woman, had been much worried for several days, owing to the dissatisfaction of the workmen employed by her firm. They had long been demanding higher wages, and threatened to strike, and latterly the Socialists had been loudly proclaiming their doctrines, so that many of the employés in the large firms of the town had become imbued with these Socialistic ideas. Schmidt and Sons' workmen had always been considered contented and well paid. But they soon showed that they were not indifferent to the spirit of unrest which was stalking through the country; nor deaf to the fustian that was talked by loafing demagogues, who found that it paid better to spout treason, and to undersap the peace and happiness of the community, than to do honest labour. The result was that the firm of Schmidt and Sons, that is to say, the Frau, soon began to receive practical proof that she was to suffer with the rest.

Now, there is one thing that must be said in the Frau's favour, and that is she showed very great regard for her workpeople, and they were paid at a higher rate than any other employés in the town. Of course, it is possible that it was not altogether philanthropy that actuated her here, be-

cause, by following this course, she was enabled to command the very best skilled labour, and as a consequence the work turned out was all first-class, and soon acquired a reputation which meant, as a matter of fact, an extensive and constantly extending connection. This, perhaps, was the true secret of the growth and wealth of the firm. For many years the Frau had believed that whatever were the social upheavals that occurred around her she would not be affected, but she was destined to prove the fallacy of this faith. The large number of employés in the service of her firm showed themselves ready converts to the new doctrine which preached social equality and equal distribution of wealth ; and indifferent to past favours, and dead to gratitude, they began to agitate for increased pay, and to clamour for some of the profits made by the firm. This agitation could not have occurred at a worse time, for the firm had just entered into many new and important contracts ; but, owing to the increased keenness in competition, these contracts had been taken on considerably reduced terms. But the workpeople, showing no regard for this, displayed an inclination to revolt and to hamper the firm in every way until their unreasonable demands had been complied with.

Of course this could not fail to affect the Frau, and she got out of health. One day she had been at the foundry nearly the whole day, and during the afternoon had called the heads of her various departments together and tried to reason with them. But as they gave no indication of yielding she got very excited, and threatening to dismiss them all summarily and close the works, she went away in high dudgeon.

When she reached her home she was very exhausted, and refusing to take anything said she would go and lie down for an hour or two. A little later her maid went to call her to dress for dinner, but she found that she would never respond to a call again, for she had fallen into that sleep that knows no awakening. The Frau, to the maid's horror, was stone dead.

CHAPTER XLIX.

POOR HUMANITY.


It would be altogether an impossible task to attempt to convey anything like an adequate notion of the awfulness of the shock which the Frau's sudden death caused her family. While yet far from an old woman, and while yet her busy brain was dreaming dreams of greater greatness and increased wealth, she had gone to the dust, and a weak and fatty heart had, with appalling suddenness, cut short her schemes. Bertha was literally stunned, and it almost seemed at one time as if she would not recover from the blow.

The Frau was carried to her last resting-place with great pomp and show, and all Zurich affected to mourn, though of course this was only in a conventional sense. Outside of her own immediate family circle it may be doubted if there was any real sorrow. Possibly the silly woman had thought during her lifetime that when her end came the world would pause in its revolutions, and men would bow their heads into the dust and weep. Poor thing, had she been of a moralizing turn of mind she might have mused on the nothingness of things, and have been chastened by the reflection that almost before the breath is out of the dead king's body the cry goes up of "Long live the King." But she probably had deemed all men mortal but herself; and thought that her time for going into the shadows was a long, long way off, for was she not very busy, and though wealthy, more wealth had yet to be won. The poor, the homeless, the hungry might die, it were

better perhaps that they should. But she was not poor, nor homeless, nor hungry, and therefore the Great Leveller would come not near her. But the inexorable Fates, who weave the threads of human destiny, take no note of the schemes and dreams of the human atoms who flit like motes in a sun-beam for a brief space, and then are lost in the darkness for ever. The Frau had worshipped Mammon, but Mammon was powerless to give her back her youth ; to strengthen the heart that had grown weak, or stay the dart of Death for one brief instant when the Fates had cut her threads.

Now, whatever the Frau's faults were, her sons and daughter had been blind to them, and bore her deep affection, so that her sudden death was a terrible trial. The sons, however, found, necessarily so, a certain amount of distraction, for they had much to do, and the reins of business that had fallen from the mother's dead hand had to be taken up. It was characteristic of the Frau that she had kept a very tight grip indeed upon the business, and, not anticipating that she was so soon to be summoned away, she had not so set her house in order that her going produced no confusion. As a matter of fact a good deal of disorganization resulted and claimed the young men's attention. Then, apart from this, there were lawyers to be dealt with in reference to the Frau's will, and the winding up of her estate, so that the sons had little time for dwelling upon their loss, and having consigned their mother to her last resting-place, beside her late husband, they had to entirely abandon themselves once more to the great business of money-making. Even the death of their mother could not be allowed to interfere with that.

With Bertha, however, it was different. She had no such distraction as her brothers. Moreover, her mother had been part and parcel of her daily life, and now that death had separated them the poor girl seemed to sink into hopeless despair, and for a time she was threatened with serious illness. Had she been in perfect accord with her husband she might have found in him some compensation for her



loss, some true comfort in her unutterable sorrow. But she loved him not, neither felt for him that respect which a wife should feel for her husband. It will thus be easily understood how a sense of awful loneliness settled upon her, for there was nothing in the wide world just then that could distract her thoughts, and nobody to fill her dead mother's place.

It was a heavy penalty for the unhappy girl to have to pay for the folly in which she had played an almost unconscious part. But "the sins of the father are visited upon the children," and "the evil men do in their lives lives after them." The daughter was the victim of the mother's silly and senseless vanity, and an uncongenial and loveless marriage was the result.

It must be said that, so far as such a man was capable of showing true sympathy, the Count did sympathise with Bertha, and he tried in his own peculiar way to comfort her. But he knew perfectly well that she secretly despised him, and that being the case, he could not altogether worship her. Her grief at length assumed such alarming aspects that the doctor said it was imperatively necessary that she should travel for a time, so that her mind might be gradually weaned from dwelling upon the irreparable loss she had sustained.

The Count was rejoiced at the prospects of a change, and as his wife offered no objection to going, he at once arranged for an extended tour through France and England. He was fond of travelling about, and this opportunity to gratify his taste could not fail to afford him satisfaction. Bertha had ceased to take an interest in anything, and seemed to be indifferent as to where she went to or what she did. Consequently the grand furniture of the Chateau was packed away, and the house itself shut up, and then the Count and his wife, for so we must continue to call her, accompanied by a man-servant and a maid, directed their steps towards Paris.

When the Frau's will was opened, it was found that she

had directed, by a codicil, that, as her daughter was married, and her sons would probably marry also before long, the house of Beau Séjour, with all its belongings, was to be sold, and the amount realized was to go into her general estate for division in accordance with her wishes. Her furniture, however, together with the horses, carriages, wines, pictures, and plate, were equally distributed between her two sons.

In accordance, therefore, with the testator's wishes the once happy and beautiful home of Beau Séjour was soon in the hands of surveyors and valuers, and in the process of time it was thrown open for public inspection, previous to being sold by public auction. Then through its splendid rooms and beautiful grounds streamed an irreverent crowd, more than ninety per cent. of them being attracted by idle curiosity. Coarse criticism and vulgar jest were heard in the rooms that had once echoed with joyous laughter and sweet song. It is true the Frau had been very worldly, but she certainly knew how to make a comfortable home; how to surround herself with luxury; how to minister and pander to the sensual tastes. There had been nothing ascetic in her mode of living. She believed it was the duty of every human being to make life as enjoyable as possible, and she did not concern herself about those who differed from her. If they liked to assume the *rôle* of martyrs, and to flagellate themselves in order to benefit their souls they might do it, but so far as she was concerned she had resolved that she would not go through life with peas in her shoes. Thus Beau Séjour had been a home of every conceivable luxury, and the tastes of her children had been pampered and pandered to in every possible way. But now, alas! the end had come. The great change, which is the inevitable lot of all things and beings, had taken place, and the peace of the home was broken, its sanctity desecrated, and the fires of its hearth had turned to ashes.

There had been a few years of struggling for the plums


of life ; there had been planning and scheming, and some jealousy ; a great deal of vanity (as though human beings had aught to be vain of), with occasional heart-burnings, and a little hatred and uncharitableness. But all this is very human, though alas the end is only—DUST !

CHAPTER L.

THE SHADOW OF NEMESIS.

AMONG the many curious aspects of life which necessarily afford food for the moralizer there is none, perhaps, more curious than the influence one person exerts upon another for good or ill—an influence that lives long after the person himself has mouldered into the dust from whence he sprung. Human destinies are so knit and interwoven that it is impossible for any man, though he be an anchorite, to live an existence that does not in some way affect somebody else.

These reflections naturally arise from a consideration of Count von Arenberg's position. His influence for evil had been great, and his life had been an ominous shadow on the lives of many others. To Rebecca Cohen's happiness he had proved a blight; and when she heard of his knavery and treachery there was no wonder that she was fired with a desire to punish him. She could hardly fail to have regrets in turning her back upon Russia, but these regrets were somewhat compensated for by the feeling that she was going to wreak vengeance on the man who had wrecked her. In her father's case this feeling was not nearly so strong. Not but what he was greatly embittered against the Count, but he would have preferred to have gone on nursing that bitterness rather than have seen the results of his years of labour scattered to the winds as he now saw them. He went forth from St. Petersburg an old and broken man. His life lay behind him, for his future years



could at the most be but few, and each year would only bring him increased feebleness, and serve to make him realize more acutely how near he was approaching to the dust.

Solomon Cohen was not by any means a poor man. That is, he had more than sufficient remaining from the wreck to supply him with his needs. But still his loss had been heavy, his sacrifices great, and to such a man, who loved money for money's sake, that meant an ever present grief.

And so father and daughter, each with different feelings and moved by different motives, journeyed together to Zurich. And the Count, dreaming not in his wildest dreamings that they were coming, had begun to think that all danger had passed, for since his enemy Mosse had not come back it seemed to him, and he even wished that it were so, that something had happened to him, and it might be that he was dead. With this thought came a sense of relief to the Count. The incubus was removed, and he breathed freer, while the future appeared to him to open up as a golden vista. The Frau was dead, and he had already learned that he would benefit under her will, and very shortly his wife, as he was pleased to think her, would come into her fortune, and, though between him and her there were strained relations, he was not the man to allow such a trifle as that to affect him so long as his purse was never empty. He was too shallow-pated, too unreasoning, too unmindful of the past to imagine that Nemesis might be pursuing him, and so with a light heart he set out upon his travels with Bertha, and, whatever her views might be, he determined to enjoy himself. He was enabled now to travel in a certain amount of state. He had his valet at his beck and call, and he was totally free from all anxiety as regarded money matters. Truly he had dropped—that is he thought so—upon a bed of roses, and it was well worth playing the game he had played for the stakes he had won.

What a contrast between him and the poor girl who believed herself to be his wife! All the brightness seemed to have gone out of her life, and an ineffable sorrow weighed her down, so that she felt that never again would she be able to lift up her head out of the gloom into which she had been cast. The loss she had sustained was an irreparable one, and she was not reluctant to turn her back upon Zurich for a time at least. And when the Count suggested that they should travel about for a year or more she expressed herself as being rather glad.

It was not long after they had departed before Solomon Cohen and his daughter arrived, and when in the course of a day or two the old man had recovered from the effects of the journey, he began to dream of money again, and thought to himself—"I'll make this precious son-in-law of mine disgorge some of the money he had from me." But Rebecca, on the other hand, dreamed of nothing but vengeance, and she lost no time in making inquiries about the Count, only to learn, however, that his grand residence was given over for a time to dust and darkness, and he himself had gone away for a year at least; possibly longer. At first she was disposed to get on to the housetops—figuratively, of course—and proclaim his villainy to the world. But her father was more cautious, more far-seeing, and said—

"Restrain your impetuosity, girl. If you make this affair public your precious husband will take fright, and we shall never see him again. Stop until you come face to face with him; and since he has the handling of so much wealth, we'll make him pay heavily. We must have money, do you hear?—money, money, for think what I have lost in leaving Russia."

Necessarily Rebecca was disappointed, for though her vengeance would keep she was all impatience to punish the man who had so shamefully betrayed her. But notwithstanding this she constantly thought of Joseph Courrette, thought of him with heartfelt pity, and as one who was dead; and

for the sake of the affection she had borne him she resolved to lose no time in going to see his parents. She might be able to give them some crumbs of comfort, and though she herself could not regard it as even a remote possibility that she would behold him again, she thought to cheer his mother and father by encouraging them to hope.

Mr. and Mrs. Courrette received her with open arms when they learned that she had known Joseph in Russia. They were humble and hardworking people, and their son's going away had been a terrible blow to them. They had only had one brief note from him since his departure, and knowing as they did that he had identified himself with Nihilism, they had deemed it prudent, for obvious reasons, not to make any inquiries about him, and now when they heard that he was in Siberia they regarded him as lost to them for ever.

At first the old people were very reserved with Rebecca. Perhaps the circumstances of their lives had made them suspicious, and Rebecca, on her part, had been careful not to refer to the affection she bore for Joseph. But in the course of time, as they became more familiar—for Rebecca visited them frequently, as she had come to like them for Joseph's sake—they grew more confidential, and gradually and incidentally she revealed to them the mission that had brought her to Zurich, and when they heard that the Count was a villain, and not the lawful husband of Bertha Schmidt, they seemed to be seized with a fierce joy, especially the old woman, as she exclaimed—

"The she-cat,—meaning Bertha,—she's rightly served. It's a judgment on her. She thought our poor boy wasn't good enough, though she and her people had come out of the gutter. But neither she nor her mother, nor any of her family was fit to fasten the latchets of Joseph's shoes."

"Hush, you are forgetting yourself," urged her husband. "It is better that you held your tongue."

"I sha'n't hold my tongue," she cried. "I've held my tongue long enough, and I'll speak now. Maybe if I had spoken earlier Joseph would not be where he is. We have been fools, that's what we've been."

"Poor Joseph," said Rebecca, musingly, as her thoughts reverted to all that had passed between them, and his confession of love for her. "If it had not been for that wretch, Count von Arenberg, I should have been Joseph's wife."

"And you would have got a good husband," exclaimed the old woman, "for I can tell you something about Joseph that will astonish you."

CHAPTER LI.

SETTING THE TRAP.

MRS. COURRETTE was very excited, and though her husband tried to restrain her she would not keep quiet, but turning angrily upon him cried—

"I tell you, man, we have been fools to hold our peace as long as we have done, and I for one do not intend to keep silent any longer. It is our fault entirely that Joseph left us as he did. Had we told him his story years ago his career would have been very different, and we should not now be mourning him as dead."

"We did it for the best ; we did it all for the best, wife," said the old man, sorrowfully.

"Aye, perhaps we did," she answered. "But the time has come now when we may let those stuck-up gutter people, the Schmidts, know that the man they treated with such scorn, and thought not good enough for their daughter, is a member of one of the noblest of Polish families."

Rebecca looked at the speaker in dumb amazement, and with a look of incredulity on her face that could not possibly be mistaken. Nor did it pass unnoticed by the old woman, who exclaimed—

"Ah, you may well be surprised, but it is true what I say. Just as true as God is in heaven."

Rebecca was still incredulous, and she asked with the suspicion of a smile lurking in the corners of her mouth—

"If this is true, then, how is it I find you occupying such a humble position as that you now occupy?"

"We occupy the position we were born to," the woman answered. "We are labourers, and have been labourers all our lives."

"Then how is it your son is a member of a noble family?"

"As you have gone so far, you had better speak out at once," growled the old man angrily, "and tell Mademoiselle Rebecca that we are not the parents of Joseph."

"Not his parents!" cried Rebecca in breathless astonishment.

"No," continued the old woman, "but I am going to tell you all, if my man will hold his noise and let me tell you in my own way." She paused to see if her husband would say anything, but as he showed no inclination to interfere again, she continued—"We have brought Joseph up from the time he was a baby, but he is not our son, and in no way related to us. I am a Russian by birth, and my husband is a Pole, but brought up in Russia; and many years ago we took service in the family of Count Matriskie in Geneva."

"And who was Count Matriskie?" Rebecca asked as the old woman paused.

"He belonged to one of the very highest and wealthiest families in all Poland, and his wife was one of the most beautiful and accomplished women that ever walked this earth."

"Aye, that she was, that she was," put in the old man, catching some of his wife's enthusiasm.

"Well," she went on, "the Count was exiled for some offence against the Russian Government, and he foolishly mixed himself up with the Nihilists."

"And is Joseph the Count's son?" asked Rebecca in a tone that told of suppressed excitement and intense interest.

"Yes," was the answer. Rebecca's face flushed red and then grew pale, for many conflicting emotions tortured her as she listened to this strange revelation. "Yes, he was the

Count's son," the woman continued, "but his father was killed by the Nihilists in Geneva. It was an awful blow to his mother, and she nearly went mad, and as she had reason to fear that her own life would be taken, she bound me and my husband by a solemn oath taken on the symbol of our Mother Church, that we would protect her son in the event of her death, and conceal his identity from him as long as he should live, for he could not go back to Poland, as the Act of Banishment applied to the children for two generations. Moreover, all the estates had been confiscated, so that Joseph would have been a beggar in his own country. Had his mother lived he would have been brought up as a gentleman, for she had a life interest in a valuable wine producing estate in Germany, but the interest ceased at her death. The poor Countess knew, therefore, that her son had little to look forward to if she died, and she made us promise that we would put him to school until he was fourteen, and then let him learn a trade. What money she had she gave us, together with all her valuables, and she told us to invest it, and at our death the capital was to go to her son. But, poor boy, I fear he'll not want it now, for those who go to Siberia as convicts seldom return. It is a grave from which the living dead come not forth."

The old woman broke down with a fit of weeping, and Rebecca had great difficulty in restraining her own feelings. But she managed to ask—

"And the Countess—was she killed?"

The old man answered, for his wife was too overcome to speak—

"Yes. The wretches killed her within a few days of her husband's death."

"What a remarkable story," said Rebecca, thoughtfully, and feeling deeply grieved at the sad fate that had befallen Joseph. "It is a great pity that the poor fellow has had such a darkened career," she added, in a tone which seemed to convey some reproach, though perhaps that was not

intended. But it was evident that Mrs. Courrette took it in that light, for she exclaimed quickly—

"That is no fault of ours. We have done our duty, at any rate, and we have loved the boy as if he had been our own."

"I do not doubt for a moment that you have," answered Rebecca, wishing to remove the wrong impression she saw she had given.

"Aye, that we have," put in the husband. "But you see the lad was foolish and headstrong, and if he had not fallen in love with Bertha Schmidt, things would have been all right."

It was strange, and yet perhaps not strange, how strong a feeling of positive jealousy came into Rebecca's heart as old Courrette gave utterance to these words. Of course she knew nothing of Bertha ; she had never set eyes upon her. But still she was moved by jealousy, although she would not have admitted this.

As may well be imagined, the remarkable revelation made to her by the Courrettes only served to still further unsettle Rebecca, and she was more than ever determined to punish severely the adventurer, Count von Arenberg. She was not unmindful, however, of the difficulties that lay in the way of punishing him by law, because firstly, he was an alien, and so was she ; and, secondly, he had married her in Russia and Bertha in Zurich, consequently many complications would arise. Of course publicity in itself would be a severe punishment, but she argued with herself that such a knave, who had no reputation to lose, would care little for publicity, and might even defy her, and challenge her to prove the marriage, and unfortunately, owing to the hurried manner in which she was compelled to leave Russia, she had come away without the necessary documentary evidence. And if she were to apply for it now it would probably be the means of bringing herself and father under notice of the authorities, so that they might be ordered to quit Swiss territory.

Under these circumstances she deemed it advisable to appeal to her friend Rudolph Mosse, who had returned to Frankfort to take up the threads of his business again. Mosse's advice was brief and to the purpose. It was—

"Bide your time, and let me know when our dear friend the Count von Arenberg returns."

Three months passed and the Count was still absent. Rebecca was beginning to grow restless and impatient; for she had little occupation now to absorb her attention. The loss of his business preyed very much on her father, who felt his position acutely, and showed it too. His hair had whitened to snow, and his face had lost its freshness, and had become hollow and sallow. At length Rebecca heard through the concierge who lived in the lodge at the Chateau, and looked after the grounds, that the Count was coming home for a time on some business in connection with the winding up of the Frau's estate. Rebecca had cultivated acquaintance with this old man and his wife in order that she might derive information as to the Count's movements. She learnt further that Bertha, who ought to have accompanied her husband, was too ill to travel, and would remain in London, where she then was, until her husband rejoined her.

Rebecca became very excited when she got the news, and she immediately telegraphed to Mosse. Twenty-four hours later he arrived in Zurich. His desire for revenge was as fierce as ever. The sting of the blow the Count had given him still rankled in his heart, and he felt he could never rest until he had utterly ruined his enemy.

No man could pursue another as steadfastly and untiringly as Mosse pursued Count von Arenberg, unless actuated by hatred of no ordinary kind. But Mosse did hate the Count with an intensity of hatred that was not likely to be satisfied with any compromise. And he knew that he had him completely at his mercy and he was determined to crush him down so that he should never rise again.

"We must not spring upon him like tigers from a bush on the unwary traveller," he remarked to Rebecca. "Scoundrel as he is, we do not thirst for his blood. We want to torture his heart. That will be an infinitely more exquisite revenge than slaying him would be. Besides, by the latter course we should bring ourselves within the clutch of the law. By showing him to the world in all his naked villainy we shall have the world with us, and the law will be against him. I propose, therefore, that I accompany you to the Chateau, and we'll confront this delightful young man together."

Now that the supreme moment had come Rebecca's nerves somewhat failed her, and, dreading the ordeal of the scene that would necessarily ensue when she and her husband were face to face, she suggested that in the first instance Mosse should go alone.

"Very well," said Mosse, "I'll do so." And it suddenly occurred to him that he might exact from his victim a considerable amount of money before the axe fell.

CHAPTER LII.

MERCILESS.

ALL unconscious that Nemesis was waiting for him, Count von Arenberg journeyed gaily back to Zurich. He had so far enjoyed his tour, although his wife had been in exceedingly bad health. But this did not prevent him from abandoning himself to pleasure, for, as already stated, there was little love between them, and so he spent much of his time away from her, greatly to her relief and his gratification. And since he had no anxiety as to money matters, he was singularly light-hearted. Truly with him, "Sufficient for the day was the evil thereof." It had ever been so, in fact. He had always lived in the present, and heeded not the future. He seemed to be incapable of any serious reflection, or of any deep thought. To use an expressive and common idiom, he was "either up in the clouds or grovelling in the dust."

After a brief sojourn in Paris, he and Bertha had gone to London. At first the poor girl seemed to pick up a little, but the change was only transitory, and she became a prey to a settled gloom. While in London they received a request from the family lawyers that they would return for a time, as it was of the highest importance that certain matters should be personally discussed by the family and documents signed. Bertha, however, resolutely declined to return to Zurich then, and being in a very weak state of health, she said she would remain in London until her husband

came back, when it was arranged they should proceed to Southampton and sail thence for Madeira, where they proposed to pass some months.

A few rooms had been prepared in the Chateau for the Count, and in due course he arrived with his servant. It was noted by his friends that he was not only looking very well, but was in most excellent spirits; and on the second evening he gave a snug little dinner to a couple of dozen of his male acquaintances. It was about mid-day after this revel that the thunderbolt which had been so carefully prepared for him fell with crushing effect. It came in the person of Rudolph Mosse, who unceremoniously presented himself at the Chateau.

The Count had only just risen, and not expecting visitors, he descended in dressing gown and slippers, and Turkish fez, to the breakfast room to take his coffee, when from the veranda there entered to him his arch enemy Mosse. For a moment or two the Count was speechless, and then he exclaimed in a tone of exasperation, not unmingled with alarm—

“What devil has sent you back?”

“That is not a kindly greeting, my dear, gentle friend,” returned Mosse as he sank into a luxurious chair. “And I declare you don’t seem glad to see me. That is curious. You should be glad you know, for I have been a good friend to you. Wherefore this ingratitude then?”

“Look here, Mosse,” cried the Count fiercely as he struck the table with his hand, “you can spare your irony and your miserable sarcasms. There is no love between you and me, and if you think you are going to persecute me with impunity, let me at once say that you are deceiving yourself, for I’ll find some means of relieving myself of your hateful presence.”

“Hand me that box of cigars, dear boy, and do not excite yourself. It is bad for your digestion,” returned Mosse, with most irritating coolness.

Angered almost beyond endurance, the Count sprang up with the intention of ringing the bell, but before he could do so Mosse said in a tone that at once arrested him in the act—

"Stay! I have something of great importance to say to you, and if you don't allow me to say it here, all Zurich shall resound with it in a few hours."

"Say it then at once, and go," answered the Count, still standing.

Mosse got up slowly from the chair, and, confronting the Count, and fixing his keen eyes on his anxious face, he said—

"You are aware that I know that about you, which, if I choose to make it public, will be your ruin?"

"Yes. You know that I made an idiot of myself in Russia, but that is too long ago to affect me now; besides, even if you were to proclaim my Russian marriage people wouldn't believe you here. I should denounce you as an unscrupulous villain, whose sole aim and object was to extort money from me. Depend upon it, if you try on that game you will come off second best."

A peculiar smile of supreme scorn came into Mosse's fat face at these words, and he made answer—

"Like most men who live on the brink of a volcano you have become insensible to your danger. But Count von Arenberg you are a consummate fool as well as an unmitigated scoundrel——"

The Count did not like this, and he said menacingly—

"Beware how you insult me. Remember I horsewhipped you once, and, by God, I'll do it again, and the next time more effectually."

He could hardly have made a more unfortunate remark than this. It was like passing a rasp over a still tender wound, and Mosse's usually placid face assumed a look of stern anger.

"I told you that you were a consummate fool," he said.

"Now you are giving indubitable proof that I am right. For, if you had not been a fool, you would never have deemed it possible that I of all men, would forgive or forget that blow. I resolved from that moment to tear the mask from you, and let the world know what a villain you are. As regards your threats I care nothing for them, so don't waste your breath in making them."

The Count had become very pale, and was evidently suffering from great agitation.

"What do you want with me?" he demanded with suppressed passion. "What do you wish me to do? If you desire money and are reasonable, name your price, and I will endeavour to purchase immunity from your persecution."

"Hand me over then at once twenty thousand francs——" said Mosse.

"Are you mad?" cried the Count, despairingly. "How do you suppose I can command such a large sum on so short a notice?"

"You can get it," replied Mosse, coolly.

"No, I cannot. You must wait until I return to my wife, who is in London. She has control over the money, and I should have to invent some excuse for getting so large a sum from her."

"Your wife is in London, is she?" remarked Mosse, with a sneer.

"Yes," answered the Count, failing to notice anything ominous in the other's manner.

"Oh! Then how about your wife who was in Russia?"

"I neither know nor care anything about her. I only hope she is dead," exclaimed the Count, in a tone of intense exasperation.

"How very charitable," sneered Mosse.

"Charitable or not charitable, that is my wish," answered the Count. "She dragged me into the marriage, and I hate and detest her."

At these words Mosse flashed into anger. It was the

first time he had displayed his feelings to such an extent but he could not help it now. And it is to his credit that he would hear no word of evil cast upon the spotless reputation of his old friend's daughter.

"You are a cowardly and disgraceful blackguard to say that," he exclaimed with great warmth. "You know that it's an infamous lie. *You* dragged her down, and like the base knave that you are, you deserted her."

The Count winced beneath this strong language, and with utter indiscretion he cried fiercely—

"The lie is on your side. You know nothing about the matter. She was dangerous and subtle as a serpent, and she lured me to my destruction."

"You would not dare say that to her face," replied Mosse, clenching his fists in anger.

"Would I not," cried the Count with a coarse laugh. "I would tell her that and much more. But why on earth have you set yourself up as her champion? If you think to intimidate me by threatening me by that course you have made a mistake. I defy you. You have done all the harm you can do, and if you persecute me any more I will see if there are not some means to silence you."

"You are a ——," began Mosse, fiercely. Then he suddenly checked himself and said—"Good. Defy to your heart's content, if it please you; but before the day is done I will make you change your tune." Without another word he turned on his heel and walked away, leaving the Count bewildered and pale with an awful sense of fear. But he plucked up courage in a little while, and in a few minutes was driving to his solicitor, where he was to meet Fritz and Peter Schmidt and discuss the family affairs, and he resolved at all hazards to leave Zurich that night and return to London. Two hours' later Mosse came back to the Chateau accompanied by Rebecca. He learned from the concierge, who knew nothing of the relations between the two men, that the Count had gone to a family conference at his solicitor's.

"Nothing could serve our purpose better," said Mosse to his companion. "We will take part in this family conference."

Rebecca offered no opposition, and so they returned to Zurich, and presented themselves at the solicitor's office. Naturally they were asked their business, and Mosse replied that they had business with the Count, and must see him at once. A clerk was proceeding into the room to deliver this message when Mosse and Rebecca followed closely at his heels, and entered the room before they could be stopped: Fritz and Peter, the Count, the executors of the will, and two members of the legal firm were present, and they all naturally turned with amazement to the intruders.

With the most perfect self-command Mosse bowed, and fixing his eyes on the Count, who seemed to have suddenly turned to stone, he said—

"Pardon me for my unceremonious entry, gentlemen, but I have a duty to perform. My name is Rudolph Mosse, and I come from Frankfort, and this lady is the wife of that gentleman there—the Count von Arenberg."

CHAPTER LIII.

DEADLY ENEMIES.

A LOOK of utter consternation and bewilderment fell upon the assembly as Mosse introduced himself. A deathly pallor spread itself over the Count's face, and he seemed to be gasping for breath ; while, to add to the painfulness of the scene, Rebecca uttered a little cry and fell fainting to the floor. Mosse stooped down, raised her up, and placed her on a chair, and then asked for some water, which was supplied from a decanter on the table. Fritz was the first to recover his presence of mind, and turning to the Count, he asked—

“What is the meaning of this? Is that man mad, or is he making a fool of us, or *is he speaking the truth?*”

The Count, however, seemed to have been stricken dumb, and made no reply, but Mosse did.

“I am not mad, neither am I making a fool of you. The man there whom you have considered your brother-in-law is an impostor and an adventurer. This lady is his wife, and was married to him in St. Petersburg.”

Peter and his brother looked at each other in blank amazement, for this revelation, if proved true, meant a scandal that would be a crushing blow to their pride, to say nothing of the effect it would have upon their sister.

Rebecca had recovered by this time, but she was terribly pale and agitated. She cast her eyes on her husband's ghastly face, and that look seemed to bring life into him

again, but still he had a dazed, vacant expression. He rose up mechanically, and in a hoarse, hollow voice said—

“I should like to speak to this woman privately for a few minutes.”

His words stung Rebecca to the quick, and springing to her feet she cried—

“What do you mean by referring to me as this woman? I am your wife, and bear your name and title.”

Then turning to the astonished group of men, who seemed utterly at a loss what to say or how to act in this startling little drama, she said—

“Gentlemen, you see in me one of the Count’s victims. Under the name of Oppenheim he married me in St. Petersburg, and having robbed my father of a large sum of money, he decamped, and until now I have never set eyes upon him since. Nor should I have known who he was or where he was had it not been for Mr. Mosse.”

The brows of Fritz and Peter darkened as the two brothers turned angrily to the Count for some explanation. But he seemed quite incapable of giving any. His presence of mind deserted him, and this unexpected *dénoûment* rendered him helpless in view of the exposure and certain ruin which stared him in the face.

“This is an exceedingly painful scene,” observed one of the solicitors, “and I think, madame, you are bound to furnish the most undeniable proof of your claim and statement. You are perhaps aware that the Count is assumed by us to be the lawful husband of another lady who is at present absent from this country, and——”

“Stay,” exclaimed the Count, interrupting him, and recovering himself somewhat, though the pallor of his face had rather increased, and the nerves in his face twitched with excitement. “Stay,” he repeated, “I confess that there is, or has been, some connection between me and this lady. But I ask, and I have a right to ask, that she and I be allowed to have a private interview before anything more is said, or anything further done.”

There was a ring of despairing appeal in his tone, and he seemed to be suffering terribly. But both his tone and his manner rather alarmed Rebecca than won her sympathies, and she said—

"I do not care to trust myself alone with you."

"She is right," said Mosse. "I remember that you once committed an outrage on me, and there is no telling what you might do on her."

The Count glared at his persecutor, but he saw how powerless he was, and how thoroughly he was in the hands of the enemy.

"Very well," he said, "since you constitute yourself the protector of that lady who claims to be my wife, I suppose it's no use my offering any opposition to your remaining."

"I constitute myself your wife's protector," retorted Mosse, vehemently, "because I happen to know something of your cowardly nature, and to what length it can carry you."

The Count was conscious that he had made another mistake in venturing on such a remark. But turning to Peter and Fritz and the solicitors, he said—

"Gentlemen, pray suspend your judgment for the present. I think that I shall be able to prove that I am not altogether the villain Mr. Mosse seems so anxious to make me out."

His words had not quite the mollifying effect he wished them to have. The brothers felt stunned at the prospect of the terrible scandal this would cause in the town; while the solicitors knew only too well that the Count was guilty, for his manner and acts betrayed him.

"I think, gentlemen, we had better retire, and discuss elsewhere what is best to be done in this painful state of affairs," said one of the lawyers, and so without further parley they all left the room, and Mosse, the Count, and Rebecca, were all face to face.

The Count was the first to speak.

"Rebecca," he said appealingly, "I am in your power entirely, and I freely confess I have done you a grievous, cruel wrong. But I have been worse than foolish. I think I must have been mad, and, believe me, I have erred more through want of head than heart. Had I only myself to consider, I would make no appeal to you, but would take all the consequences of my act. But there is an unhappy lady in the case, who is in extremely delicate health, and if she comes to know of this it will kill her. For her sake, therefore, I ask you to keep silent——"

His extraordinary want of tact and judgment which had characterized all his career was again forcibly displayed in this unfortunate reference to Bertha, for naturally it only served to inflame Rebecca, and interrupting him, she cried—

"And pray, who is this woman, that I should have consideration for her?"


"She is my wife."

"You lie," exclaimed Rebecca, stamping her foot in anger. "I am your wife."

"Very well, then," he returned, in a tone of reckless despair. "You are my wife. But it is certain, after what has passed, you can bear me no love, and we can never live together again. You can, of course, utterly ruin me if you like, but what purpose will that serve? For the sake, therefore, of the unfortunate people who must suffer for my sins, I pray to you to keep silent. You shall have money as much as you like, and——"

She turned upon him with such a fierce gesture that he stopped abruptly in his speech.

"You pitiable coward," she hissed. "What do you take me for? What do you suppose I am? Think you that my sense of honour is less keen or my pride less strong than that of the other wretched woman you have so shamefully deceived? No, I am not to be bought. You may buy her, but you cannot buy me."



"Have you no pity?" he exclaimed, putting his hands to his head.

"Pity," she laughed scornfully. "No, I have not. What pity had you for me when you blighted the best years of my life, and took my youth from me? I trusted you, believed in you, only to find that I had been shamefully deceived; and now that you are run to earth you whine about pity, and insult me, your lawful wife, by offering me terms to remain silent, because you are afraid that this other family will suffer by the scandal. No word of contempt I can use will express the utter abhorrence I feel for you."

"I do not ask pity for myself," he said with a sob, "but I plead for the unhappy lady who believes herself to be my wife, and for her family."

"What have I got to do with them?" Rebecca cried with increased anger, for her self-love was deeply wounded by his evident desire to place Bertha and her people so much higher than herself. "I have no earthly interest in them, and I should like to know upon what principle you expect me to sacrifice myself for them. You grossly and shamefully deceived me, and I have come from Russia to drag the mask of hypocrisy and deceit from your face, and show the world how great a scoundrel you are."

The Count seemed to reel a little as if a faintness had come upon him, but, with an effort, he recovered himself, and with one hand on the back of a chair, and the other pressing his heart, while his ghastly face looked like the face of a dead man rather than a living one, he said in husky tones—

"And for you coming here I presume I have to thank my good friend Mosse."

"If thanks are due, your good friend Mosse is entitled to them," said Mosse, answering for himself, and speaking with biting irony.

The Count's eyes glared with an expression that was little short of ferocious, and biting his lips and clenching his fists, he appeared to be meditating an assault upon his enemy.

But he suddenly seemed to think better of it, and breaking into a bitter laugh said—

"It is not the only thing I am indebted to you for, my very virtuous friend. The score is getting heavy, but rest assured I will wipe it out some day."

"I shall be ready if ever the day comes," replied Mosse. "But as you are a man of words, not deeds, the day is, I have no doubt, far enough off."

"We shall see," muttered the Count, with an ill-concealed menace in his tone. Then turning to Rebecca, he said, "It is useless to prolong this interview. I am faint and ill, and shall drop dead at your feet if I remain much longer. As a final word—if your heart is not quite flint, try and find some compassion for me."

"What compassion have you shown for me?" she asked, angrily.

"None," he answered.

"Then why do you expect me to be more merciful than you have been?"

"You are right. I ought not to expect it. We live in a world where evil is met by evil, and blow returned for blow. So let it be. I am to understand then that you intend to make our relationship public?"

"Yes."

"And nothing will purchase your silence?"

"Nothing."

He drew himself up straight, and snapping his finger and thumb in her face, he exclaimed with the recklessness of despair—

"Do your worst then. I defy you, and even in your moment of seeming triumph I'll checkmate you."

He pushed her roughly aside, opened the door, banged it after him, and passed out. In a few moments Fritz, Peter, and their lawyers came in, and plied Mosse and Rebecca with questions. Peter was almost beside himself with grief and shame, and although he had been the means of intro-

ducing the Count into the family, he had been the only one who had set his face against the hasty marriage, and he now exclaimed reproachfully—

“If my advice had been taken we should have been spared this awful disgrace. Providence was kind to take our poor mother, for had she been living this blow to her pride would have driven her raving mad.”

CHAPTER LIV.

BLOOD FOR BLOOD.

"ILL news travels apace," and it would have been almost impossible to prevent the revelation which had come like a thunder-clap on the house of Schmidt from spreading on the wings of the wind. The Schmidts had too many enemies in Zurich for such an unctuous morsel of gossip to be suppressed. And so the story was told from mouth to mouth with variations, embellishments, and exaggerations, until the Count was accused of almost every vice under the sun; and altogether forgetting the wholesome maxim—"Speak no ill of the dead"—the most spiteful and bitter things were said of the poor dead Frau. Her vanity was her greatest weakness, and being dead her sins might have been remembered against her no more. But human nature is full of the gall of spleen, and those whom the silly woman had snubbed in her lifetime now found pleasure in abusing her.

In the meantime the cause of all this had disappeared. Instead of going back to the Chateau as the brothers expected he would do, he went off no man knew whither, and when three or four days had passed it began to be rumoured that he had committed suicide, though there was not a scrap of evidence to justify the rumour. On the fifth day, the brothers being at their wits' ends how to act in the painful dilemma in which they were so suddenly placed, came to the conclusion that one thing at any rate was

important, and that was to bring their sister home ; and it was mutually agreed that Peter should go upon this important duty. He accordingly lost no time in setting out on his journey.

When he reached London he was not surprised to find that his sister had not heard anything of the Count since he went away. Peter was prepared for this, and told her that he had come to take her home, as the Count had suddenly been called to Germany on important business. It was the best excuse he could think of, and he felt it was justified under the unhappy circumstances.

Bertha expressed no surprise or concern at this piece of news. But the fact is she was in a serious condition of health, and seemed to have sunk into that state of mind peculiar to some illnesses, when the patient ceases to take interest in or feel concern about anything on earth. During her stay in London she had been under the treatment of a celebrated physician, and before taking her away her brother called on this gentleman to learn his opinion.

The doctor expressed himself decidedly averse to her returning to Zurich, and said that as her complaint was more of a nervous character, it was of the highest importance that she should have constant change, and go to a warm and sunny climate, suggesting as the best possible thing a Mediterranean trip. Peter was struck with the suggestion, for he saw at once that by taking his sister away for three or four months, time would have been given to the gossips in Zurich to have talked themselves out, and for some plan to be arranged with regard to Bertha's future. He therefore proposed the trip to her, and she offered no objection ; so he immediately wrote to his brother, saying he contemplated making a three or four months' voyage up the Mediterranean with Bertha, and if he approved of the idea he was to furnish him at once with the necessary letters of credit, and make arrangements to do without him for that period.

Fritz saw as quickly as Peter had done the very decided

advantage of keeping Bertha out of the way for a time, and this opinion being endorsed by the family solicitors, word was sent to Peter that the course he suggested was entirely approved of, and in the meantime a divorce was to be applied for.

Within a fortnight, therefore, Peter and his sister had commenced their voyage, and whatever Bertha might have thought in regard to her husband's strange absence, she made no comment and asked no questions. It is very probable she felt relieved, and was glad to be free for a time.

In the meanwhile where was the Count? Those most interested in Zurich in discovering his whereabouts made every inquiry in order to try and learn whether he had gone away. But these inquiries quite failed to bring forth any clue, and so the belief that he had committed suicide gained strength. But still, as his body was not forthcoming, people had to confess that a good deal of mystery surrounded the affair. A month later, however, this mystery was to receive a startling and terrible solution, not in Zurich, though, but in Frankfort. One Saturday morning a very brief note was delivered to Rudolph Mosse at his office. It was signed "Rebecca Cohen—Countess von Arenberg." It asked him to come round that evening at eight o'clock to an address that was given, and it said—"The door will be opened to you by a woman. You need ask no questions of her, but simply say you are Mr. Mosse, and she will show you in. I have a particular reason for this. Be sure you come, and if possible bring four thousand marks with you. I want a temporary loan. I will return it to you in a fortnight."

Mosse certainly did think this was a rather peculiar kind of note to come from Rebecca, and he was astounded that she should have come to Frankfort without having previously informed him that she was coming. But as he reasoned the matter out he came to the conclusion that she had some

very good reason for acting so strangely, and that reason was connected with her husband. He therefore resolved to go, and to take the money with him.

It was striking eight as he presented himself at the address. It was in a quiet, and, at night time, deserted square, and where the tenement houses were unusually tall. He found on reference to the note that he had to mount up to the very top of one of these tenements, that was to the seventh flat, and to a man of his obesity such a journey was appalling. In fact so alarmed was he at the prospect of mounting up seven long flights of stairs, that he thought of scribbling a line to Rebecca, asking her to descend to him, and he would have done this could he have got any one to take the note up. But the square was deserted, and, though he waited for ten minutes, the only person he saw was an old grey-headed gentleman, and of course he could not ask him to undertake such a commission, so he set his face to the task and commenced the ascent. By the time he had reached the fifth landing he was struggling for breath, and when he arrived at the seventh he was entirely pumped out. A feeble gas jet partially illuminated the landing, and by its aid he discovered that there was no name plate on the door. He rang the bell, and very soon the door was opened by an old and decrepit woman, who was evidently expecting him, and without ceremony she led the way into a large ill-furnished room. Then she retired and closed the door, and, thoroughly exhausted, Mosse sank down on to a couch, unbuttoned his waistcoat, and loosened his collar, in order that he might more quickly recover his spent breath, and he resolved to rate Rebecca for imposing such a climb upon him. But in a few moments the door opened, and instead of Rebecca the Count von Arenberg himself appeared. He was strangely altered. He had all the appearance of a man who had been dissipating heavily. His eyes were bleared and bloodshot, his face haggard, his beard unkempt, his hair uncombed and tangled. Mosse started up, and the colour

fled from his face as he realized instantly that he had been trapped. The Count had his hand in his side pocket as he entered. He now drew it out, and in it he held a revolver. Mosse saw this, and he grew paler, as he exclaimed—

"What is the meaning of this? Do you intend to murder me?"

"Yes," said the Count, with a hollow laugh. "I told you when we were last in Zurich that there was a heavy score between us, and I would settle it some day. I did not anticipate that you would be so easily lured here, and you are a greater fool than I thought you to be."

The sudden shock of fear that had come upon him seemed to have partly dazed Mosse, who made a movement towards the door, but the Count placed himself in front of him, and levelling the revolver said—

"You are doomed. We are alone in the house, for I sent the old woman out. Nothing can save you, and the reason I do not shoot you on the spot is that I want to prolong your agony, for mortal man never hated another man as I hate you."

Mosse was deathly pale, and the perspiration streamed out of him. He glanced uneasily round the room, and then in a broken voice he said—

"Do not murder me in cold blood. I will give you money, if that is what you want——"

"You idiot!" interrupted the Count, fiercely, "not all the money you possess or are ever likely to possess could induce me to forego the joy I shall have in seeing you dead at my feet. You have not spared me. You have utterly ruined me, blasted me in every way. Now the triumph is mine, and the fierce joy of revenge fires my blood and thrills my heart."

He fired. Mosse reeled, staggered, and fell back on to the couch, and blood streamed from a wound in his head; but he was not mortally hurt, and he struggled to his feet. The Count fired again, but he was excited now, and missed his aim, and the bullet crashed into the wall.

Mosse was a powerful man in spite of his obesity, and now mortal fear lent him additional strength. A chair was standing by the table. He seized it suddenly, and hurled it at the Count, and it felled him to the ground ; but with marvellous agility he got on to his knees, and once more fired. This time the bullet struck Mosse on the left side over the ribs, causing him to stagger backwards, though he did not fall. The Count was bleeding profusely from a terrible gash in the temple caused by the chair, and the blood was filling his eyes and his mouth. Half blinded and mad with passion, he struggled to his feet and once more fired, but missed his aim.

The room was a large one, but poorly furnished. There was no fireplace, but a large porcelain stove. On the top of the stove a bottle was standing. It was an ordinary litre wine bottle. Mosse's eyes fell upon it, and with difficulty he staggered round the table. The Count rubbed the blood from his eyes with his knuckles, and knowing now that it was a life and death struggle, he tried to get near his man, so as to make sure of killing him. But terror made Mosse active. He seized the bottle, and with terrible force smashed it on his adversary's head. The Count fell heavily against the table and broke it. Then Mosse staggered towards the door, intending to escape, but even at this awful moment, and in the presence of death, the Count's hatred and revengeful feelings were not abated. He rose up with difficulty. He was a ghastly object, for his face was literally covered with blood, and his eyes seemed starting from his head. He got on to his feet, and reeling like a drunken man, he seized his antagonist, placed the revolver close to his breast, and fired, but not before Mosse had knocked the weapon up, so that the bullet missed him and went crashing through the ceiling.

Still more maddened by his failure, and growing momentarily weaker, the Count grasped the revolver by the barrel and struck Mosse on the head. They then seized each other,

and fought and tore one another like savage beasts, until their clothes hung in shreds. But the Count stuck to his revolver, and at the most all the other could do was to keep him from using it. This life and death struggle lasted for some minutes, during which they fell and rose again ; fell again and rose once more ; crashed on to the couch and smashed it, shivered the glass of a cheffonier to pieces, and with their blood splashed the walls, the ceiling, the floor, the furniture.

They uttered no word, only fierce growls and snortings, while their breath came quick and stertorously. The place was like a shambles. The blood ran down the walls, dripped from the ceiling, and lay in huge clotted lumps on the floor, while the appearance of the men was unutterably awful. But such a struggle could not last long, and Mosse's weight began to tell in his favour until at length he was enabled to loosen the other's grip. Then he seized a chair and battered the Count's skull, and the wretched man fell in a heap in a corner. Weak, blinded, faint, Mosse tried to reach the door, and probably would have succeeded in doing so, but with a last upleaping of energy the Count turned over. Strangely enough he still held the revolver, and with a mighty effort he raised his arm and fired. It was a wild, random shot, but it took effect, for the bullet struck Mosse full in the back and went clean through him. He uttered no cry, but fell forward on his face with a ponderous thud, and never moved again.

The Count was conscious that his enemy had fallen, for a fierce light of revengeful joy gleamed for a moment in his fast glazing eye, but the next instant he sank down again an inert mass, and then all was still, and very soon nine o'clock tolled out from the town clocks.

About ten minutes or a quarter of an hour later the old woman returned. She had been sent out by the Count to do some trivial commission, and having done it she came back, little dreaming of the ghastly drama that had been

played to the bitter end during her brief absence. She went straight into the kitchen to deposit her things. Silence reigned through the house, and at last she went to the room to see if the Count was there. When she opened the door and beheld the gruesome sight, she uttered a wailing scream of fright and horror, and then, like one from whom reason had fled, she tore recklessly down those seven flights of steps and rushed into the square, still screaming.

When people came she told what she had seen in broken sentences, but they were sufficiently coherent to convey some idea of the tragedy. Gendarmes were got, and when they mounted to that slaughterhouse even they were horrified. They found Mosse stone dead, but the Count was still breathing, though his face and head seemed like pulp, and his eyes were completely hidden by the swollen flesh and clotted blood. They straightened him out and laid him on his back, and he uttered a groan of agony. Somebody ran for a doctor, who was soon on the spot, but his services could avail nothing, for five minutes later he pronounced Count von Arenberg to be dead. He and his victim had gone to the bar of the Eternal Judge together.

CHAPTER LV.

A COMMON SORROW, A JOINT LOVE.

FOR many days Frankfort was excited over the dreadful tragedy that had been enacted in that old house in the quiet square. It had all the elements of mystery about it, but in the process of time the police gradually solved the mystery, and it was then revealed that only a week before the crime the Count had taken the flat furnished for a period of six months. He had evidently selected this spot and this house, firstly, because the square was quiet and secluded; and, secondly, the flat underneath the one he had rented was tenantless. He had engaged the old woman the day he had entered, and she could give no information about him beyond that he seemed to be very gloomy and drank a great deal. He had told her on the night of the tragedy that a gentleman was coming at eight o'clock, and she was to ask no questions but simply show him in. As soon as the stranger had arrived her master despatched her to purchase some sausages and saurkraut for supper. When all the evidence had been gathered together it became clear that the Count never dreamed that his own life would be sacrificed, but he had laid his plans cunningly to encompass the death of his enemy. His imitation of his wife's handwriting and signature was very clumsily done, although it had deceived Mosse and lured him to his doom. But wonder was expressed—and well it might be—that the victim's suspicions had not been aroused by the request for

the four thousand marks. But that they were not was evidenced by the money being found on his dead body. There was reason to conclude that it was the Count's intention to have left the country with this money after murdering his victim. And it was proved that from the time of leaving Zurich he had drank heavily, and on the day of the tragedy he was almost, if not entirely, without means.

Rebecca was terribly shocked at the death of Mosse, but she had no pity or respect for the man who had so shamefully deceived her, although he was her husband.

Peter and his sister were still away, and they remained ignorant of the tragedy until they returned two months later. But while Fritz informed his brother of all that had taken place, Bertha was simply told that the Count was dead. And when she inquired how and where he died, she was curtly informed that he had died suddenly in Frankfort. Very soon, however, the whole truth was revealed to her, for one of those spiteful and officious people, who, alas! are too numerous in all communities, sent her—of course, anonymously—three or four newspapers containing the fullest details of the crime. The poor girl—who had been almost quite restored by her voyage—was again cast down for several days, for she felt with terrible keenness the slur and the scandal which attached themselves to her unfortunate family.

It was an awful ending to the Frau's dream of greatness, and many a time in her bitter sorrow Bertha's thoughts reverted to Joseph, who, she still believed, was simply a humble workman, and she felt that in refusing him she had brought the trouble upon herself.

In two or three weeks she had recovered somewhat from the blow, but all her youth seemed to have left her, and though she was still very young, she had become subdued and thoughtful, with a look of premature age on her face.

One day she presented herself at Rebecca Cohen's residence, and, introducing herself, said—

"You and I have suffered from a common sorrow and a common wrong, and that fact should draw us together. I feel for you deeply and truly, and I beg that you will let me be your friend."

Rebecca was much touched, any jealousy she might have felt had left her now, and taking the other's hand she answered—

"You have been even more cruelly treated than I have, and I reciprocate your sorrow. Let me be your sister."

This request went to the softest part of Bertha's heart, and her response was tears.

Very soon these two women were knit in a bond of friendship that seemed likely to last as long as their lives. To Bertha this friendship was of even greater moment than it was to Rebecca, for she felt so utterly lonely and crushed. Her pride had indeed had a fall, she was now exceedingly humble, and her large fortune troubled her, for she had no desire for riches, and she had made a solemn vow to herself over her mother's grave that she would never marry again. Her thoughts and desires inclined towards a religious life, and she would have liked to have given herself up entirely to religion; but her brothers dissuaded her, at least for a time, for they were afraid of her fortune passing out of the family.

Bertha found in Rebecca a fit and very amiable companion, and it was but natural in the circumstances that she should grow deeply attached to her. Rebecca knew that Joseph Courrette had been in love with Bertha. She knew this both from little things he had said, as well as from the photograph she had found in his box. She had therefore studiously refrained from ever speaking of him, though often and often did she think of him and dream of him, and wonder what his fate had been—if he still lived, or if his bones mouldered in some Siberian wilderness. But one day Bertha quite incidentally mentioned his name, and this struck a keynote as it were.

"You knew Joseph Courrette well?" Rebecca remarked quickly.

"Yes. Very well."

"Did you love him?"

"I was an inexperienced girl then, and scarcely knew my own mind, and I was not sure whether I did or not, but I know now that I did."

Rebecca sighed, and Bertha asked in astonishment—
"Did you know him?"

Rebecca was reluctant at first to tell all she knew, but by degrees she shook reluctance off, and related the story of her acquaintance with Joseph in all its details. And of course Bertha learnt how Joseph, sorrow-stricken, desperate and reckless, had allied himself with the Nihilists, and had been sent to exile in the dreaded Siberia.

All the sorrow she had experienced up to this moment was as nothing to the sorrow she felt now. In the loneliness of her own chamber she wept until she had scarcely any more tears to weep. The bitterness of regret almost drove her mad, for she saw how, being led away by blinding vanity, she had wrecked this man who would have worshipped her.

Ah, what happy days those were when he used to come to Beau Séjour, and write to her when she was a careless girl at school in Berne. They were days that were so near, and yet to her they seemed so far off, for she looked towards them through a blinding mist of tears, and along a vista that was shadowed by sorrow and wrong. How soon, alas! the storms of life had beaten upon her, leaving her now like a stranded wreck.

For some days after she came to know this story of Joseph she was prostrated, but slowly she recovered strength again, and it was not long before she called upon Courrette's foster parents. At first they were disposed to spurn her, but she soon won her way to their hearts, and piece by piece they told her Joseph's history, and the details of that dark

crime in Geneva years and years ago when he was a baby.

Still later she repeated the strange story to her brothers, for she was resolved that they should know. They heard it without comment, or at most only some expression of astonishment, but they were bitterly chagrined, and they felt that, if ever people had thrown away substance for shadow, they had done so.

Of course they were not altogether to blame for setting their faces against their sister marrying a man they believed to be an obscure and humble workman. Though, when their own humble origin was considered, they might have been content that their sister should be wife to a skilful and honest artizan. But where they were to blame was being in such a hurry to make a so-called grand match for Bertha; and in countenancing her marriage with a man of whom they knew so little. At the same time it could not be denied they had been greatly influenced by their mother, and they could not help blaming her, though they did not put their thoughts into words. She, in fact, had swayed them, and they had too readily yielded.

Since Bertha's return she had not occupied the pompous residence, the Chateau, that her mother had presented her with. It had so many painful associations for her that she put it in the market, and took as a temporary abode, until she had decided on her future course, a house of exceedingly modest pretensions, where she lived a very retired and quiet life. Almost her only visitor was Rebecca, for between the two women had sprung up a very warm friendship indeed. They were drawn together, not only by the common wrong to which they had both been victims, but by sympathies and tastes. Had she been so disposed, Bertha might have surrounded herself with the *élite* of Zurich, both her beauty and wealth being powerful attractions; while suitors in dozens would have been forthcoming had she but given them a sign of encouragement. But she was resolved

never to marry again ; while the hypocrisy of those who now longed for her acquaintance disgusted her, for many of them had found no terms harsh enough to apply to her. And yet these same people were ready to fawn and cringe because she had wealth. But she resolutely kept them all aloof, and to every one's astonishment she elected to live a humble life. How much of this was due to her remembrance of Courrette she would not have cared to confess. But she knew that she had never loved but one man—that man was Joseph Courrette, and he was lost to her for ever.

Occasionally she and her friend Rebecca talked of Joseph, but they tried to conceal that they spoke of him as a dead love, though each knew that in the other's heart his image was indelibly engraven. But they had no jealous feelings. They were beyond that; and moreover, neither had the faintest shadow of a hope that she would behold him again. They discussed him as one who had gone down into the grave, and they did not dare to think that the grave would give back its dead. But had they been endowed with any prescient power they might have seen a shadow coming ever towards them, slowly and painfully, and seeming verily to come out of the silence of the grave, but growing more distinct and more real as it marched onward slowly, slowly and sadly, until Joseph Courrette stood revealed.

CHAPTER LVI.

FROM STORMLIGHT TO HOLY CALM OF TWILIGHT.

It is eighteen months since that dark tragedy in Frankfort, and two men are sitting outside of a café in Geneva. It is the evening of a summer day. The Juras are enfolded in rich velvety shadows, while the waters of the lake are shimmering like burnished brass in the light of the setting sun. The cafés are all crowded, and apparently gay and light-hearted people throng the streets. It may be that those who laugh loudest have the saddest histories; but there are few in all those crowds, perhaps, who can tell a stranger or more startling story than one of the two men, and that one is Joseph Courrette. His companion is Michael Chansky.

Chansky looks older, greyer, and more worn, but the change in him is as nothing when compared with that which has taken place in Joseph. His face wears an air of settled melancholy, and is haggard, careworn, and hollow. Its every lineament tells of intense and long-continued suffering. His hair is streaked with grey, and his frame is gaunt and bowed. Although still a young man he seems to have lost every trace of youth. But it is evident that he is ill, or very slowly recovering from some terrible malady. He has only been in Geneva a few days, and he has been telling his friend a strange story. He has brought the narrative down to the moment when he was betrayed by the treacherous guide into the hands of the frontier guard.

"As soon as I found myself again a prisoner," he continued, "I resolved that I would die a hundred deaths rather than be sent back to Siberia. It was terrible after all that I had endured, and, when a few more miles would have given me liberty, to find myself in the grip of the enemy. But I thought to myself, living you can torture me, but dead I can defy you, and I resolved to kill myself the very first chance I got. Although I was closely watched and strictly guarded my captors treated me fairly well, and I was informed that an escort would arrive soon to conduct me to the nearest town on the route taken by the convicts going to Siberia, and that I should be attached to the next batch, and so sent back to the mines. This prospect was so appalling that none but a craven would have desired to live to face it, and the idea of killing myself was always present with me.

"Three or four weeks passed, but the escort came not. The close confinement I was subjected to was telling on my health, so that at last the Captain of the guard agreed to give me a certain amount of liberty if I would pledge my word that I would make no attempt to escape. This liberty consisted in accompanying him in the chase. He was passionately fond of hunting, and the neighbouring mountains swarmed with game of all kinds, big and little. I gave the required promise, but I had not the slightest intention of keeping it, for I determined to lose no chance that might offer me to escape; and if such chance did not occur, I might, at least, find some means of putting an end to my wretched life.

"After the first two or three excursions hope began to revive in my heart. The Captain was always accompanied by three or four of his men, and he was seldom absent more than a day from his station. I was never allowed to carry arms of any kind, but to enable me to defend myself against wolves or other animals should they attack me I was furnished with a stout oak staff. But in spite of this I

began to dream of liberty, though how I was going to gain it I had not the remotest idea, for the soldiers never lost sight of me, and I was warned that if I went beyond a dozen yards from them without leave I should be shot down. Fortune, however, favoured me at last. One day we tracked a wild boar, and came up with him in a dense forest. He was a huge, ferocious fellow, but a shot from the Captain's gun only slightly wounded him, and in his rage he rushed at one of the soldiers, tore him with his tusks, and then bolted off. The man did not seem to be seriously injured, and as boars' flesh was a highly-esteemed delicacy at the station, where the food was, as a rule, of the coarsest and most wretched kind, the wounded man begged his comrades to continue their pursuit of the boar. After some consultation the Captain decided that he and two of the soldiers would continue the chase, and I and another soldier were to accompany the wounded man to the station.

"When I heard this arrangement, I said to myself, now, then, my hour of delivery has come. It is now or never, though I did not see how I was going to effect my purpose. But I determined on death or liberty. At first the injured man seemed lively enough. The boar had ripped his thigh, and we had bound the wound with wet handkerchiefs and scarves. We walked along for some three or four miles, when the fellow began to get faint, and he sat down under a tree. The wrappings were soaked through and through with blood, as were also his trousers, and when I saw that and noted the increasing paleness of his face, I had no doubt that a vein had been injured, and he was bleeding to death.

"His comrade got uneasy. He was in a dilemma. We were not more than three miles from the station, where surgical appliances and medicines were kept. And so at last, as he saw the serious condition of the injured man, who was now quite helpless, he said we must carry him. This we attempted to do, but it only increased the bleeding, and tortured him, so I suggested that I should run to the station

for help. Reluctantly he consented to this, and I started off, but not for the station. It was my life in the balance against the soldier's, and what interest had I in him? For me what was the prospect? The living, torturing death of the Siberian mines, where I knew that as a prisoner who had attempted escape, I should have to labour in chains; for the damnable cruelty of the Russian Government practised against those who fall under its displeasure has no parallel in the civilized world. Knowing all this I resolved to make one more bid for liberty. What man would not under such circumstances? Besides, I do not believe the soldier would have lived until assistance reached him, even if I had sought it. But whether or no, Fate had given me a chance for liberty, and such a chance would never occur again. It was now or never. And I did not hesitate for a moment.

"I was unarmed and had no food, but, nothing daunted, I made my way into the heart of the mountains, and kept going to the south and east. I travelled for three days, living on berries and roots, and at night sleeping under rocks or in the branches of a tree. On the fourth day I knew I had passed the frontier, and, descending the southern slopes of the mountains, I struck the river Irtish, in the Chinese Empire. So far, then, I was out of the power of Russia, and I almost felt as if I should go mad with delight.

"Following the river down, I came to a village on the banks of a lake. Here I was seized by the villagers, who threatened at first to kill me, but subsequently decided that as a living ass was better than a dead lion, it would be better to make a slave of me, and I was handed over to the head man. I stayed there two months, and almost daily I was banged about with a bamboo, because the devil who was pleased to call himself my owner said I didn't work hard enough. One night this devil got drunk, and commenced to hammer me with a bamboo, but I turned the tables on him. I seized the bamboo, knocked his brains out, took

what money he had about his person, a considerable sum, I think, together with a formidable hunting knife he carried, and some jewellery, and, thus stocked, I started off again. I travelled rapidly for several weeks, living as best I could. God knows how I did live. I crossed the Thian Shan Mountains, and reached a town called Casngar. I was about played out by this time. I was like a living skeleton, and had scarcely any clothes on my body. But the governor of this place took compassion on me, and I soon got into his favour by repairing an old ramshackle engine he had on his estate for pumping water with. It had been useless for a long time, but I put it all right, and the governor was delighted. I remained with this fellow for three months, and got together a little money, and at length he allowed me to depart with a caravan that was going to the Punjaub. In the course of time I reached Delhi, but went through many adventures and hairbreadth escapes before then. Once I was robbed, and the robbers stripped even my clothes off, and left me perfectly naked in a jungle. I managed to reach a village, and found a Samaritan in the person of an old woman who fed me up and clothed me in native costume. At Delhi I was seized with malarial fever, and for many weeks hovered between life and death in the hospital. When I recovered I was penniless, but one of the English doctors in the hospital got together by subscription nearly a hundred pounds, and gave it to me. I had told him the story of my escape from Siberia, and the hardships I had endured, and he took great interest in me. He was a splendid fellow, was that doctor.

"I travelled slowly south, and reached Calcutta. There I made the acquaintance of a Swiss merchant—a man from Bâle, and he got me a passage in a vessel going to London. And here I am now, broken and blighted, and heaven alone knows what I am going to do."

Chansky listened to this moving story with great interest. It was necessarily lacking in many details, but it did not

want much imagination to fill them in. Such a journey as that performed by Joseph was an extraordinary one considering the circumstances, and the wonder was that he had lived to tell the tale. His adventures alone would have filled a volume.

The two men discussed their future, and made many plans, and Joseph decided that he would go to England, and try to obtain employment there. A few days later, however, Chansky happened to say—

“Oh, by the way, our friends the Schmidts of Zurich have had the pride pretty well taken out of them.”

Joseph pricked up his ears.

“Indeed,” he said, “in what way?”

Chansky related all the story as he had read it in the papers, and Joseph listened to it with astonishment and even some degree of gratification. He had intended under any circumstances to go to Zurich to see his parents before starting for England; but now he had a double object for going since Rebecca was there.

Little did he dream as he set out for the town where he had passed so many years of his life how that journey was to change his fortunes. It was with strange feelings that he presented himself at the humble abode of his supposed parents.

The Courrettes—or, to give them their right name, the Finckes—who received him with unbounded joy, and before he had been with them twenty-four hours they had told him who he was, and of the murder of his parents.

As Joseph listened to this amazing revelation he was dumb, for what could he say? But his thoughts travelled away to that weird scene at the foot of the Altai Mountains, when in his dying agony Strovell made his confession, and Joseph knew now that he had closed the eyes of the assassin of his own mother and father, the Count and Countess Matriskie. Surely the irony of Fate was never illustrated in a more astounding manner. His parents he had never

known, but the man who had slain them had, by a strange destiny, become his friend and companion in misfortune, and he had soothed his dying moments in that far-off wilderness.

For many days Joseph felt like a man who walketh in a dream. It was impossible to realize it all suddenly ; but gradually in that dream came the images of two women, and they were Rebecca and Bertha, and his thoughts wove themselves about them ; and he remembered how Bertha in her pride had cast him off, but how Rebecca had with sweet tenderness given him at least a sister's love, and would have given him a wife's love in all probability had it not been for the barrier then existing. But now that barrier was removed, and he said to himself—

"I will go to Rebecca, not as Count Matriskie, but as penniless Joseph Courrette, and I will ask her if there is yet room in her heart for me. It is true I am old before my time, and worn with hardship and weakened with illness. But I can labour still, and maybe there are some years in store for me that may be worth living."

Acting on this resolution, he wrote a few lines to her as follows :—

"One who must have seemed dead to you has come to life again. Does his memory still live in your heart ? Or has time effaced it ? If not, send him a sign.—JOSEPH COURRETTE."

As Rebecca read this she almost lost her senses with joy, for sudden joy, like sudden sorrow, can slay. But in a little while she recovered, and, rushing into the presence of her father, she exclaimed—

"Father, father, he lives ! The grave has given back its dead. Joseph Courrette is here in Zurich."

"Art mad, girl ?" remarked her father, for he was unable to credit the news. But she placed the note before him, and he read and knew the handwriting, and very shortly a special messenger was speeding to Joseph with a reply. That

reply was the one word *COME*, but it was far more eloquent than pages would have been. Within an hour of receiving that request Joseph complied with it.

Rebecca's delight on beholding him may be guessed ; it cannot be described in writing. She had expected never to see him again, yet now he stood before her in the flesh. Verily it seemed as if he was one called back from the tomb.

She received him with almost delirious greetings of joy, which were seconded by old Solomon himself.

Each had much to tell, and Rebecca's wrongs stirred his heart—which he thought was stone—to life again, and his sufferings moved her to tears. His health had been terribly shattered by the fearful hardships he had endured ; but Rebecca nursed him with a tenderness and devotion that won him back to life, to hope, to strength. One evening he sat with her at the window of her father's house which commanded a view of the lake. Nature was in one of her dream moods. The lake, unruffled, was crimson in the dying light of a setting sun, and the distant Alps glowed with a colouring that seemed not of earth but heaven. The picture was one of exquisite beauty ; it was a poem without words. Something in the scene touched Joseph's emotions, and with Rebecca's hand in his he said softly—

"The world as God has made it is very beautiful, and in such a world hate should cease to exist, and love only should reign."

Then he paused, and there was silence between them ; but as the gloaming deepened he spoke again—

"Rebecca, I have but an empty title to offer you and the labour of my hands, but dare I hope that the sister's love you bore me in Russia can become the lover's love here ? "

"Yes," she answered with a sigh of joy, "for true love lives on for ever. I have never ceased to love you."

He drew her closer to him, and their lips met.

"I live again," he murmured. "The roar of the stormy

waters of the past dies away, and out of the future a new light dawns upon me."

Bertha heard of Joseph's return, but she dare not trust herself to see him. The secrets of her heart she knew how to keep. What mattered it to the world that her hopes had been early blighted, and the sunshine of her life blotted out? What mattered it that deep shadows environed her, and that those shadows would never more be lifted? What mattered it that she must go on in gloom with her eyes yearningly strained to that time far off, or near, as the case might be, when she would be able to lay down the cross that she found all too burdensome? The world should not know these things. They were her own secrets, and in uncomplaining silence she would bury her shattered idols.

Joseph's return determined her to a course that she had long contemplated, and which was the only likely one to give her any consolation. That was to join the Roman Catholic Church and enter a convent. In the solemnity of some cloistered retreat she would find the peace that she could not know in the fretting, passionate life of the everyday world. Before taking this step, however, she invested half of her large fortune in Joseph's name, and possession of this was to be given to him on his marriage morning, for she heard that Rebecca was to become his wife. Nor was he to know of it till then. When she had done this she bade farewell to her brothers, whose tears, entreaties, and threats were alike unavailing to prevent her taking the step she had resolved to take, and so she wended her way to Rome.

Three years later, as "Sister Bertha," she displayed angelic devotion in nursing the poor in Naples during an epidemic of cholera. But she herself fell a victim to the scourge, and so found that peace she had yearned for, and in a sphere of duty which had brought her more joy than ever she had before known.

In due course Joseph Courrette, or Count Matriskie, and

Rebecca Cohen became man and wife, and it might truly have been said of them—

“Two souls with but a single thought ; two hearts that beat as one.”

Joseph found that his title was not altogether an empty one, for he did not hesitate to accept the fortune Bertha had bestowed upon him. But he never knew to his dying day how he really had been her most treasured idol. The letter she had written to him and posted in Fribourg, and which she hoped would counteract the effect of the cruel one her mother had compelled her to pen, never came into his hands. It was duly delivered at the house of his foster-parents, and his mother, when she learnt his address in Russia, sent it to him, but before it arrived he was on his way to Siberia, and so it failed to reach him. If he had received it before leaving Switzerland, perhaps his story would have been less romantic, less thrilling, and her young heart would not have been broken. But Fate is inscrutable, and Destiny cannot be perverted. As the years gathered about him, bringing the blessing of children, and fraught with domestic peace, and rich in the joy of a true wife's devotion, he experienced a happiness that he had never dared to dream it possible he would know, and the twilight of life was to seem all the more beautiful and tranquil to him in contrast with the fierce stormlight which had cast such a lurid glare over his early years.

THE END.



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